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THE
HEIR OF THE AGES

I.

THE
HEIR OF THE AGES


BY
JAMES PAYN
AUTHOR OF 'BY PROXY' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON
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NOTE.

THE two poems, entitled 'The Children' and 'On an Old Harpsichord,' ascribed to Matthew Meyrick in this novel, were written by a lad who died many years ago of consumption, before he attained his majority. I never knew him personally—our relation being only that of editor and contributor—but judging from his letters, no less than from his verses, I am well convinced that in him his country lost a genius. The poems in question were written, I believe, in his nineteenth year.

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OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.



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THE
HEIR OF THE AGES.

CHAPTER I.

THE DOCTOR'S FIAT.

IF there is one attitude above all others that, in an Englishman at least, betokens personal complacency, and the sense of being monarch of all he surveys, it is the standing on his own hearthrug with his legs slightly apart, his back to the fire, and his coat-tails under his arms. Neither sculptor nor painter, so far as I know, has transferred this particular pose to marble or canvas—perhaps from the impossibility of including within it the whole human form divine—but there is nothing equal to it in the way of characteristic significance. The

head is thrown carelessly back, the shoulder-blades rest lightly on the edge of the mantel-piece, and the expression of the face is that of supreme content and undisputed authority.

Under these favourable circumstances, Mr. Christopher Melburn, of Burrow Hall, Justice of the Peace for Downshire, is introduced to the reader's notice. He is a tall, handsome, and strikingly aristocratic-looking man of sixty years old or so, but bearing that 'bouquet' of years as lightly as though it were a single flower. His fine grey eyes have not lost their fire, nor do they stand in need of glasses to read the smallest type in which his magisterial doings are chronicled in the local paper; if his brow is slightly furrowed, it is not by time so much as by a certain chronic disapproval of the turn things are taking in the world — 'opening of flood-gates, tampering with vested interests and the sacred ark of the Constitution,' &c. &c., for he is a Whig of the old school: neither in his frame nor face is there the slightest sign of decadence or of giving way to anything or anybody. When

he speaks of one of the many misfortunes which are about to befall his country, he always adds 'I shall not live to see it,' but not with that patriotic and unselfish air with which the observation is generally made ; his tone would rather lead you to understand that while Christopher Melburn is alive his country is safe, but that when he shall be gathered to his fathers (an event, however, not to occur just now by any means) the last barrier to sweeping change will have been swept away, and after that the Deluge.

In some persons the thoughts of so terrible a catastrophe taking place for certain after their demise would have affected their spirits, but this gentleman's nature was cast in too heroic a mould to be disturbed by considerations of that kind. If it had been possible for an idea of Mr. Melburn's to have taken so vague a shape, I think that some such formula as 'serve them right' would have expressed his views upon the generation that would succeed him. If he had been elected for the county when he stood for it—instead of his having

thrown away twenty thousand pounds he could ill afford in the dirt, and *on* the dirt, in that vain endeavour—he would have made a figure in Parliament, have attained a place in the Cabinet, and possibly changed the aspect of the whole political horizon from dark to light ; but since the talents which Heaven had given him had been ignored, and his patriotic aspirations unappreciated, then Downshire and the world must take the consequences. They had rejected an opportunity which certainly was not likely, looking at the state of his finances, to occur again. He was a power still, and no small one ; but that more extended sphere of usefulness to which he had looked forward (in company with a baronetcy if not a peerage) had been denied him by his fellow-countrymen, and so much the worse for them.

In his own opinion, however, which nothing could shake, Christopher Melburn was as great a man as ever ; and in his own house, and on his own hearthrug, could still regard matters with much complacency. The appearance of things about him was indeed of a

nature to inspire this feeling. The apartment in which he stood, his private sanctum—‘study’ he called it, though its array of books was limited—was a handsome one ; and the view from the great bay window—for the other and smaller one only looked out upon the carriage sweep—was very extensive.

In the foreground was a garden, bright and fresh with the tints of early spring ; the lawn sloped down to a lake beautiful in itself, and possessing the additional merit of being the only piece of ornamental water on the vast table-land of down on which Burrow Hall was situated ; upon the other side of it lay the park, which, though of somewhat small extent for so pretentious a title, was charmingly dotted with knolls and crags ; then a broad band of trees, which sheltered this favoured residence from bitter north and roaring east ; and, beyond them, the rounded masses of the South Downs stretching to left and right, like some green sea on the day after a storm.

Neither the picturesqueness of the landscape nor its extent formed, however, its

chief attraction to the person who was at present regarding it with so much approval, but the knowledge that so far as the eye could reach it was all his own. A good many senses have been added to the original five in these later years ; but there is one which must always have existed in some form as universally as to-day—the influence of which is, I am told, with some men so great as to make up for the absence of any other—namely, the sense of Possession. A few, indeed, have no personal experience of it. When they see a jewel, the glow or the sparkle of it gladdens their eye (perhaps for half a minute), but the consciousness of its being their own, though they would like to have it to sell well enough, would not enhance its charms for them in the slightest degree ; a rare volume, the ownership of which fills the book-hunter with the most pleasurable emotions, may be theirs or the first pickpocket's, for all they care, when once they have become acquainted with its contents ; while, as for that eagerness for 'laying field to field' of

which the Hebrew prophet speaks with such reprobation, it is to them an inexplicable egotism, which would carry with it, if successful, a terrible punishment indeed, since 'to be placed alone in the midst of the earth' is about the last object of their ambition. The majority of mankind, however, it is probable, think with Mr. Melburn, who, if he could have worn the stars for shirt-studs, and attached the moon to his watch-chain, would have set a much higher value on the heavenly bodies than he did at present. There was one blot upon the landscape, indeed, which no other eye perceived but his own—namely, a very heavy mortgage, begun in those electioneering times, and afterwards enlarged on certain pressing occasions; but just now it did not intrude upon him. He was not only at ease with himself, as indeed it was his wont to be, but with the world at large—including the Jews.

At this moment a step was heard coming down the stairs from the floor above—a very heavy step, which nevertheless moved with as

little sound as the weight of him to whom it belonged admitted of ; a slow and thoughtful step, which somehow conveyed the impression to the hearer of a made-up mind.

‘ Thank goodness, Edith is all right,’ observed Mr. Christopher Melburn to himself. ‘ When Dalling comes down like that without stopping at the landing the case is clear—there are no complications.’

He had had opportunities of hearing Dr. Dalling’s step when it had lingered ; not once nor twice only, had it been the doctor’s task to tell the squire bad news concerning his own flesh and blood. Two daughters and a son had died under his roof of the fell disease, consumption. His son, Jefferson, the sole offspring of his first marriage, was, indeed, strong and healthy enough ; but Mary, his remaining child by the second marriage, was delicate ; and her mother had been an invalid for years. Some new phase in her condition had necessitated the doctor’s visit on this occasion. To her daughter it had seemed alarming ; but Mr. Melburn thought, or pretended to think,

otherwise. He always discredited everything personally disagreeable to himself as an imputation against Providence, and on this occasion had sent for the doctor less from apprehension than to have his own view corroborated by a medical opinion.

The door opened, and in stalked a man of such gigantic stature that if he had died, as some men are said to do, by inches, he might have composed an encyclopædia, supplement and all, during his last illness. All that is often to be said of such exceptional individuals is that they are very tall men ; but this Anak was remarkable for something besides his thews and sinews. There is a well-known saying in these days that 'there are only two doctors out of London,' a statement which varies with the speaker, and becomes enlarged, let us hope, with his experience ; but if, as doubtless was the case, it was made in the times of which we write, the name of Dr. Dalling would certainly have been found in the most exclusive list. So great was his fame that he was sometimes even summoned to the

metropolis to take part in consultations. In Downshire he was called 'The Infallible,' and by his intimates 'The Pope.' Though confident of speech, his manners and movements were exceptionally gentle ; it almost seemed, as with Gulliver among the Liliputians, that in associating with his fellow-men he was afraid of his own strength and weight ; and indeed there was some reason for his being careful. Some years ago, striding home one evening along the downs—for whenever he could, he used his own legs instead of his horse's—he was set upon by two tramps or footpads. It was during a thick fog, or they would probably never have committed such an act of imprudence. Probably they only saw a part of him, and very naturally mistook it for the whole. When the doctor loomed upon them in his entirety they would very gladly have dropped their bludgeons and fled ; but matters were too far advanced for remedy : his gigantic arms flew out like the suckers of an octopus, and seized each man by the scruff of his neck ; then he knocked their heads together—just

once. In the one case, as he intended, there was a simple fracture, but in the other—perhaps the poor wretch had a softer cranium—the blow was fatal. It was said that Dr. Dalling ever afterwards shrank from attending cases of concussion of the brain, which, in a hunting country, must have been inconvenient.

His huge countenance, bronzed by wind and weather, looked very grave and gentle as he now entered the room. But even if that had not been its normal expression, Mr. Christopher Melburn would have declined to draw from it any evil augury.

‘Well, doctor, and what’s your news?’ he inquired, without shifting his comfortable position. ‘This east wind has been playing its usual tricks, I suppose, with my unfortunate wife.’

‘It has not improved matters, no doubt,’ was the dry reply; ‘but the weather is but a small factor in a case like hers. I am sorry to say that I think badly of her.’

‘So you have said any time during these last ten years,’ returned the squire, with an

attempt at cheerfulness. 'We can hardly expect to see poor Edith very strong again, of course ; but, as she says herself, "creaking doors hang long." You don't mean, surely, to assert of your positive knowledge that there is any danger ?'

From underneath the doctor's shaggy eyebrows, which would have made a tolerable head of hair for most sexagenarians, there flashed forth a terrible look of contempt and reproof.

'There is more than danger, Mr. Melburn,' he put in, curtly. 'Your wife's malady has, in my opinion, taken a direction that can only have one end.'

The squire turned pale, and, gathering himself together, walked straight up to his companion, who was standing by the window.

'Good heavens, Dalling ! Do you mean that my wife is dying ?' His tone had genuine feeling in it : he was shocked.

'There is no *immediate* danger, if you mean that, Mr. Melburn.'

The other uttered a sigh of relief.

‘She may rise from her bed to-morrow—in all probability will do so, for she has the pluck of two women—and may even come down stairs as usual; but her recovery is utterly hopeless. The only thing that can prolong her life is change of air, of scene, of all the conditions of life to which she is accustomed. As soon as she is strong enough to bear the journey, you must take her to the German baths, which formerly benefited her so much. It is advice, Mr. Melburn,’ he continued, observing the other was about to speak, ‘which I should not think of offering—since I know from her own lips the inconvenience it will entail upon you—if there were any choice in the matter; but, in my judgment, there is none.’

‘Really, Dalling,’ said the squire, walking about the room with rapid strides, ‘your advice is more like a *congé d’élire* than a medical prescription. One would think that there was some penalty like that of *præmunire* for any one who should be so audacious as to neglect it.’

‘I don’t know as to penalty,’ observed the doctor, drily; ‘but the simple effect of such neglect will be that “the creaking door” of which you spoke will not hang upon its fragile hinge three months. It is for you to decide whether it is worth while to prolong life under circumstances which may seem to you undesirable. In our profession we have only one view of such matters: but very possibly it may be an erroneous one.’

‘It is very inconvenient,’ murmured Mr. Melburn, testily, but without taking the least notice of his companion’s satire, ‘just as the spring is coming on, and matters on the estate want particular attention. We’re expecting the new governess, too, this very day; and Jefferson is coming home on purpose to meet Winthrop.’

‘The world is full of inconveniences,’ returned the doctor, cheerfully; ‘and one can no more escape from them than I can keep myself dry in a shower by picking my way through the drops of rain.’ He could afford to joke, for he knew that he had carried his

point; when the squire began to count his slain—to enumerate his grievances—it was a sign that the battle was over.

The matter being settled, the doctor had the tact, seldom wanting to gentlemen of his calling, to make no further reference to it. The critical state of Mrs. Melburn's health was not indeed, one would have thought, a subject to be dismissed so curtly; but he knew his man, and that he required quite as 'peculiar treatment' as his patient.

'And who is the young lady,' he inquired, 'whom you have engaged as Miss Mary's governess?'

'A Miss Dart. She has taken the highest honours a young woman can compass: has a diploma, very much more imposing than was ever given by the College of Physicians; is highly distinguished in all the ologies, while she is only "favourably mentioned" as regards accomplishments. I suspect she'll be a caution; which, as among her other duties she will have to ward off trespassers on Winthrop's preserve, it is only right and proper

she should be. She will probably have sandy hair and red eyes. Talk of an angel and we hear the flutter of her wings. Here's the carriage, just come back with her from the railway station ; so you can judge for yourself.'

The two gentlemen turned to the window ; which, thanks to an artfully contrived blind, enabled the occupant of the study to command the porch without exposing himself to view, and thereby to decide whether he should be at home, or not at home, to visitors. For the space of three minutes they stood, with their noses flattened against the blind, in silence, till the front door closed, announcing that the new-comer had come in. Then Mr. Christopher Melburn observed to his companion, 'By Jingo ! eh !' and Dr. Dalling elevated his eyebrows, and very softly and significantly whistled. When men are alone together their manner of expressing the emotions is primitive.

CHAPTER II.

JEFFERSON.

‘WILL papa consent to your going abroad, do you think, mother?’

‘Yes, darling, I do. At all events, I have done my best.’

‘How good you are to me!’

‘Nonsense! Did you not hear the doctor say that change was essential to me?’

‘But that was after you reminded him what good the baths had done you before.’

‘Well, if you choose to feel that I have conferred an obligation on you, perhaps you will be so good as to help me on to the sofa.’

‘But, suppose papa were to come up and find you there, would he not think——’

‘He will not come up,’ put in the sick lady, quietly. Her tone was confident, but

there was a little shiver in it full of sad significance. Most husbands, even those with whom any demonstrativeness of affection is not 'their way,' upon hearing such tidings as Christopher Melburn had heard that afternoon, would have come to say a word of comfort and sympathy to their sick wife. It was not only that the time had long gone by, however, in his case for the exhibition of domestic sentiment, but, as she well understood, he would abstain from any such proceeding with a purpose—namely, to mark his disapprobation of the step which he had been compelled at her instigation (as he put it) to consent to. He was by no means convinced of its necessity (he never could be so convinced when anything was disagreeable to him), and even if he had been—but that is a subject, perhaps, into which it is better not to go.

Life is a sacred thing to many natures which never take into consideration matters that alone make it worth the living. We may use no daggers, and yet drain from every vein of those about us the only true life-

blood—happiness, affection, hope. It is an operation that is going on every day in the most respectable households ; and, to do them justice, without the knowledge—at all events the full knowledge—of the operators. But the patients are very conscious of it, save where at the last indifference and despair proffer themselves as anæsthetics.

It was twenty years ago since Christopher Melburn had led his second bride to the altar. He had been a widower for the same space of time ; but though the bridegroom was middle-aged, a handsomer pair had never been seen in Downshire since his previous nuptials. The bride, though of good family, had little or no fortune ; but her youth and beauty were justly held to have made up for that deficiency : though not a love-match in the usual acceptation of the term, it could not be called a marriage of convenience. There was nothing sordid about it, there was no self-sacrifice ; and, though the squire's son might well have objected to a stepmother of his own age, there was apparently no oppo-

sition. The happy pair passed their honeymoon in Wales, mostly in a carriage and four. Under such circumstances, existence takes the tint of rose-colour, and Christopher Melburn was just the man to shine in them. Their return to Burrow Hall was accomplished in a carriage and pair, and a silver age succeeded the golden one. In due time came the young family and their expenses, which, added to the heavy loss consequent on that futile attempt to save the country, tried the squire's purse-strings and his temper severely. Then Mrs. Melburn fell into ill-health, and lost much of that beauty which was her chief attraction in her husband's eyes : this was not only very hard upon him, but seemed a sort of non-fulfilment of her part of the bargain, and he took little pains to conceal his displeasure. The children, pretty and aristocratic-looking, whom he admitted did her credit, failed and died, to his extreme annoyance, and even the one that survived fell somehow short of what he expected of her.

Mary was fair as a lily but almost as fragile, she was not the companion that he had pictured to himself she would have been to him in his walks and drives ; moreover, and this he resented more than all, she ranged herself upon her mother's side, which (so far had matters gone by this time) was equivalent to antagonism. It was true that Jefferson—now a Major in the Dragoons—had not so ranged himself ; his attitude, as regards his stepmother, had, to all outward appearances, been always strictly neutral ; but the squire was not upon the best of terms with his son. There had been college debts, and other debts, though not of a very serious character, for if the young man's military career had not been brilliant, it had not been exceptionally expensive. Even these outgoings had ceased ; but the squire had an uneasy suspicion that the Major was not living within his allowance, but had borrowed money in anticipation of his own demise.

This idea was wormwood to the squire. The very notion of death was as objectionable

to him as it was to Louis XIV.; but that such an event should be speculated upon as regarded himself was treason. That Jefferson did not marry, and thereby repair the family fortunes, had at one time been another cause at first of disappointment and afterwards of disquietude with the squire. But that source of worry had long been dry.

Fortunately, Mary's fortune was in the way of being assured. Mr. Winthrop, one of the magnates of Downshire, was understood to be her suitor, though he was not as yet her betrothed. His habits were a little dissipated, but doubtless he would have sown his wild oats before he became a married man. Such a connection was in every way desirable, and would strengthen the squire's position in the county. But even in this matter there was a hitch. Mary did not give the young gentleman the encouragement he had the right to expect, and, when paternal pressure was exercised, escaped from it on plea of ill-health, and sought sanctuary in her mother's sick-room. The squire had no grounds for

asserting that his wife connived at her daughter's disobedience, but he suspected it, and this filled his cup of bitterness almost to overflowing. For years the rift between them had been gradually widening, and they had long ceased to have bed or board in common; for though Mrs. Melburn would, on special occasions, take her place at the head of his table, she was generally unequal to the exertion, and took her meals in her own apartments and alone. It was under these circumstances that a companion, under the designation of governess, had become absolutely necessary for Mary Melburn.

Such being the state of affairs at Burrow Hall, it may well be wondered that its mistress should, as she herself had expressed it, 'have done her best,' or indeed, made any effort, to bring about an excursion to Germany (or anywhere else), *tête-à-tête* with her lord and master, and indeed it has already been hinted that she had not suggested the idea to the family doctor upon her own account. The truth was, that Fate had dealt with Mrs.

Melburn in such a fashion that she no longer lived for herself at all. When I read in the works of certain philosophers that self-interest is the sole spring of human actions, it seems to me that they are colour-blind ; at all events, they are quite unable to recognise that neutral tint in which so many natures, especially those of women, become steeped, through adverse circumstances, in later life. Indifferent to pleasure and inured to woe, they drag their lengthening chain, until the Great Deliverer sets them free ; but of any turn in Fortune's wheel in their favour in this world they well know there is no hope. Though no longer sensitive to the blows of Fate themselves, they are often vulnerable enough in the person of some beloved object, whom it is their one solicitude to shield, with all their scanty power, from harm. In Mrs. Melburn's case this object was her daughter. It would have been a small thing to say that she would have died for her : unloved, save by her alone ; unhappy, with flagging strength and failing breath, Death had small terrors : she was

ready to do far more than die—to live for Mary. All her thoughts, and they were many, were concentrated upon this point ; all her intelligence, and it was considerable, was sharpened to this end. And in the meantime, not a duty was neglected. From her sofa she superintended and directed all domestic matters with marvellous skill ; and though the means at her disposal were by no means ample, there was no house better looked after in Downshire—none where guests were made more comfortable, or dinners better served—than that of the master of Burrow Hall. Notwithstanding his frequent reflection that he was very hardly treated as regarded matrimonial matters, there were even some people who were of opinion that, after all, he had not made such a bad bargain.

Of the personal appearance of Mrs. Melburn and her daughter nothing need be said, since we shall presently have the opinion of an independent witness upon that point ; but while the mistress of the house is being transferred from her bed to her sofa we may give a

word or two to Miss Elizabeth Dart, if only in explanation of the extraordinary behaviour of the two gentlemen who had reconnoitred her from behind the blind. That she was most unexpectedly good-looking may be taken for granted ; and, indeed, anything more different from the fancy portrait that Mr. Melburn had drawn of her, it would be difficult to imagine. That she was tall and shapely could be seen as she sat in the open carriage ; but when she stepped out of it and threw back her veil, she displayed a countenance of really quite exceptional beauty. Her complexion was dark, almost to olive-colour, but with the blood showing through it in a manner that is seldom seen out of Spain ; her eyes were dark, but soft ; her hair was jet black, but swept so abruptly off her forehead that it was impossible to judge of its abundance. The expression of her face, which, to match with the rest of her appearance, should have been haughty, was, on the contrary, modest almost to timidity ; nevertheless, it was very far from insipid or

wanting in self-reliance, and the glance she cast about her on her new surroundings was full of intelligence and observation.

‘Miss Dart, for Mrs. Melburn,’ was her remark to the butler when he opened the door to her, delivered in gentle but very distinct tones ; it was a sentence that she had well considered, and yet of the propriety of which she was not quite certain—she thought it sounded too much like a message from the Parcel Delivery Company ; but it had, at all events, the desired effect of dissociating her, in the butler’s mind, from an ordinary visitor.

‘If you will wait one minute, Miss, you shall be shown up to my mistress’s room,’ was his reply.

She remained standing in the hall, while the man rang a hand-bell which produced Mrs. Melburn’s maid. There was a short colloquy between the two domestics, and then, with a clumsy word or two of explanation, the new arrival was shown into the breakfast-room. She knew that Mrs. Melburn was an

invalid, and guessed at the true state of affairs pretty accurately ; still, any delay when we are in a state of anxiety and suspense increases our discomfort. It was with a beating heart, though her face showed nothing of perturbation, that Elizabeth Dart found herself alone. She had never been in so fine a house before, nor even sat in a private carriage ; but her mind was of a cast on which mere externals, though they by no means escaped her observation, made little or no impression. With many persons who use the phrase ‘carriage people,’ the former part of the word dominates the latter ; but with this young lady humanity came first and its surroundings afterwards. She had only one friend in the world, and she was a hundred miles away ; and the question she naturally asked herself was ‘What sort of people have I come to dwell amongst?’ This problem, of which nothing was known to her, absorbed her wholly. Her natural powers of perception, however, took in not only the fact that the room was handsomely furnished, and with great taste, but its appearance in every

particular ; she noticed the landscapes on the walls, the statuettes on the brackets, the church tower that showed itself through the trees, and the shrubbery on which the window looked : this was a gift which exercised itself mechanically, and of the possession of which she herself was only half conscious. But her ear was listening for footsteps, and her mind in somewhat shrinking expectation of what sort of person they would bring with them. In a minute or so the door opened, and, as is usual under such circumstances, gave to her view an individual entirely different from the person she had pictured to herself.

Instead of the invalid lady she had looked for, appeared a military-looking gentleman of middle age, tall and very strongly built, with a bronzed, handsome face, a pair of long tawny moustaches, and bold eyes. Their boldness, however (which was, after all, only characteristic of his martial profession), vanished from them the instant they rested upon her, and was succeeded by a gentle and respectful glance.

‘A thousand pardons,’ he murmured, as she rose to meet him. ‘I was not aware that any one was here. I beg you will sit down.’

‘I regret to hear—that is, I was given to understand—that Mrs. Melburn is less well this afternoon than usual.’

‘Yes ; it is, I am sorry to say, one of her bad days. You had a pleasant journey, I hope, from town.’

‘Thank you ; yes.’

‘You must have found this March wind cold, however, coming over the downs ; they should have sent the closed carriage for you.’

‘Indeed, I was quite comfortable, and enjoyed the drive exceedingly. I have never been on downs before.’

‘One must be upon them on horseback, however, for their thorough enjoyment.’

‘That would be a still more novel experience to me,’ she said, smiling. ‘Miss Melburn is a good horsewoman, no doubt ?’

‘Pretty well ; it will probably be the one thing that we poor ignoramuses will be in a position to teach you.’

The compliment was a little pronounced ; but, coming from her employer (for she had no suspicion that she was addressing any one else), it sounded kind.

‘ I am afraid I know very few things,’ she said quietly ; ‘ hardly enough to teach me how little I do know.’

‘ That is beyond me,’ returned her companion, gently, smoothing his moustaches. ‘ You must be prepared to find us all exceedingly slow of comprehension. I think it’s the Downshire air. By-the-by, have they offered you no refreshment?’

He moved to the fireplace and touched the bell-handle, without, however, drawing it out.

‘ Indeed, Mr. Melburn, I do not need it,’ she said hurriedly. ‘ I had some tea at the junction.’

‘ And very bad it was, I’ll answer for it. Their tea no more comes from China than their teacups.’

‘ Fortunately I am not much of a connoisseur in tea,’ she answered, smiling.

‘ I dare say you despise all creature com-

forts,' he said, gravely. 'That is the way with all you intellectual people.'

'But, indeed, I am not so intellectual as all that,' she answered, naïvely; whereupon they both broke into a little laugh. In the middle of it the door opened and revealed a young lady so slight and tall, and with such a look of amazement on her pretty face, that she might have stood for a note of admiration. That she had brown hair and eyes, with very delicate features, was conveyed to Elizabeth Dart at the first glance, but the pained astonishment in every lineament of the new comer's face was so marked, that nothing else for the moment impressed itself on her.

On her late companion, however, it produced no effect whatever; he even had his laugh out as though no such interruption had occurred, and then duly observed, 'Better late than never, Miss Mary. Let me introduce you to Miss Dart, whose acquaintance I have had the good fortune to be the first of us to make.'

'I am very sorry,' said Miss Melburn (the

phrase seemed to be somehow retrospective, instead of referring, as was intended, to the words that were to follow), 'but mamma was in the act of getting up when you arrived, which prevented my coming down at once to welcome you.'

It was a pretty speech enough, and delivered in the gentlest tone; but to the sensitive ear which it addressed it wanted genuineness, or rather it seemed as though the genuineness which it should by rights have possessed had been wrung out of it. She held out her hand at the same time, but there was a stiffness in the action, and, what was worse, a stiffness that misbecame it, as though formality was not habitual to her. 'Will you kindly come with me upstairs?' she added.

With a bow to her supposed employer, which he acknowledged by a cheerful 'Au revoir, Miss Dart,' the governess followed her pupil into the hall. That something was wrong somewhere, she was convinced, and she had a strong suspicion that she was held

to blame for it, but of its nature she was wholly ignorant.

To feel that upon the very threshold of one's new life one has made a false step is a most discouraging reflection, and, though Elizabeth Dart had as brave a spirit as ever dwelt in woman, her heart sank low within her.

CHAPTER III.

THE INTERVIEW.

THERE is no living-room, to my mind, more pleasant and comfortable than a well-appointed lady's boudoir ; the rarity of man's privilege to enter its sacred precincts may enhance its charms, but its intrinsic attractions are indisputable. There is an air of rest as well as of refinement about it that captivates the sense, and which renders the idea of belonging to the gentler sex something more than tolerable—if only one were allowed to smoke. This prohibition did not, of course, affect Miss Elizabeth Dart ; and though, as we have said, she was unusually indifferent to external surroundings, the snugness and beauty of Mrs. Melburn's sanctum made no slight impression upon her. To confess the truth, she had

never seen a boudoir before ; and the reflection it evoked in her was characteristically impersonal and philosophic—‘ So this is how the rich live ; and how even ill-health is mitigated to them.’ She involuntarily contrasted in her mind this bright and cheerful room, with its birds and flowers, and the charming view it commanded from its oriel window, with a certain apartment in the New Road, where her Aunt Jane Righton, the sole relative and friend she had in the world, was wont to pass her dreary days. These thoughts occurred to her in a flash, and left her attention fixed upon the figure to which all the rest were mere accessories—the mistress of the room herself. Draped in some loose-fitting but becoming robe, ornamented with beautiful designs of the needle (her daughter’s handiwork), she lay upon a sofa, propped up by pillows ; at once the fairest and most fragile specimen of an English matron eye ever beheld. Her complexion was so exquisite, her countenance so delicate, that she would have looked like a piece of egg-shell china,

but for the expression of her countenance, which, though marred by that look of effort which arises from constant pain, and the necessity of overcoming it, was 'spirituelle' in a high degree.

'You will excuse my not rising, Miss Dart,' she said, with a gentle smile, and putting out a small transparent hand; 'but I can only afford to do so on occasions of ceremony, of which I hope you do not feel this to be one. You have had a long journey, and must be tired. Pray sit down.'

Then ensued a conversation of the ordinary sort, between employer and employed; a few questions, brief and conventional, and similarly answered, about Miss Dart's belongings, and others put, with scarcely more of interest, respecting her acquirements. She was given to understand that Miss Mary's education had practically ceased; and that what, in fact, was required for her was not so much a governess as a chaperon and companion. This explanation was given with

singular skill and delicacy, and without the least air of patronage ; but somehow the kindness lacked that personal application which, under the circumstances, would have so much enhanced it. It seemed rather to arise from a disposition naturally gracious, but by no means prone to impulse or confidence in a stranger. Elizabeth Dart had a gift of perception and intuitive knowledge which, to a great extent, made up for her want of experience in life ; but she felt that Mrs. Melburn was a problem beyond her powers.

Mary sat silent, with a grave, preoccupied look, that sat strangely upon her pretty face ; once only an expression of interest passed over her features—when her mother mentioned that in case, as was possible, she herself should be compelled to pass a month or two for her health abroad, it was probable that her daughter and Miss Dart would spend the time at Casterton, a little town on the south coast, with a sister of Mr. Melburn's.

‘You will find it very dull, I fear; but the place is picturesque.’

‘It must be very dull to seem dull to me,’ said the governess, smiling. ‘When I have not been at school, I have been pupil teacher in a school; and, with the exception of a few weeks in London with my aunt, I have seen nothing of the world at all.’

‘You do not give me that impression, Miss Dart,’ was the unexpected rejoinder. It might, of course, have been made in a complimentary sense, but the tone was serious, and Elizabeth Dart felt the colour rising in her cheeks.

‘What I mean to say,’ explained Mrs. Melburn, hastily, ‘was that you have none of that *mauvaise honte* and awkwardness of manner which one generally associates with ignorance of that kind.’

‘We learnt deportment at Acacia Lodge,’ returned the governess, with a forced smile.

‘Still, it is unusual to find social defects of that sort supplied by any assistance from without. Shut up in my sick-room, for

example, I know that I become selfish and egotistic in spite of myself—which reminds me that I have kept you sitting here with your bonnet on without offering you any refreshment. We do not dine till seven.'

'Thank you, no. Mr. Melburn was so good as to offer me a cup of tea; but, as I told him, I had some at the junction.'

'Mr. Melburn? Indeed!'

There was a surprise in Mrs. Melburn's tone which grated on the other's ear. Was it so very extraordinary, then, that the master of Burrow Hall should have condescended so far as to offer refreshment to a governess, she wondered?

'It was not papa,' put in Mary, with that reluctant haste which young persons use when making an unpleasant communication: 'it was Jefferson.'

'Jefferson!' Mrs. Melburn's surprise was even greater than before, and this time mingled with decided disapprobation. Her face, too, as she looked up sharply at the new comer, showed open displeasure. Miss

Dart's position was certainly embarrassing, but the reflection that she was in no way answerable for any mistake that might have occurred, prevented her from feeling embarrassment. The colour mounted high into her cheeks, but it was from indignation that, for the second time, blame should be unjustly imputed to her, rather than from confusion. When the light on a card-table is weak it is difficult to discover hearts from diamonds, and, without sufficient data, one cannot pronounce with certainty whether the cause of a young girl's blush is modesty or shame. There was no doubt, however, in the mind of Elizabeth Dart which of them in her case Mrs. Melburn took it for. The governess remained obstinately, perhaps audaciously, silent.

‘The gentleman who received you,’ said Mrs. Melburn, in chilling tones, ‘was not, it appears, my husband, but my step-son, Major Melburn.’

Then, in her turn, somewhat haughtily and with an almost imperceptible inclina-

tion of the head, Miss Dart replied, 'Indeed!'

Her pride, though not her temper, was fairly roused. Though willing to put her hand, and with unusual vigour, to any work, however humble, and to earn even the bitter bread of dependence without repining, she had great independence of character. She stood, as she thought, in the presence of an insolent woman who, having grudged her a civility, such as any man might pay to any girl, at her husband's hands, was still more wroth to find that it had been paid to her by another. Major Melburn's manner might, under the circumstances (as she now understood them), have been somewhat familiar, but it had been at least frank and kind. She greatly preferred it to the affected graciousness and artificial courtesy with which she had been received upstairs. This was unfortunate, as it was with those upstairs and no others that her lot was cast. If there had been time to draw distinctions, she might perhaps have excepted the younger of her two companions from this

sweeping conclusion ; but when we are young we resent the misjudgment of our contemporaries even more than that of our elders ; we have a closer claim upon their sympathy, and—to express it in homely terms—it is not their business to preach to us. Mary Melburn, it was true, had by no means preached to her ; but she had shown downstairs a wholly uncalled for displeasure—though distress would have been a better word, had Miss Dart had leisure for picking and choosing of terms ; while in the boudoir, though she had done nothing hostile, she had done nothing to smooth matters. Surely she might have said something to explain away the error into which her companion and friend that was to be had fallen, instead of confining herself to that bare statement of fact, ‘ It was not papa ; it was Jefferson.’

There was some more talk, upon other matters, but there was now a stiffness in Mrs. Melburn’s tone, quite different from the formality inseparable from a first acquaintance. It was a great relief to the new comer when

the interview was terminated by her employer suggesting that the domestic should show her to her room and see that she had everything she required.

What she required was solitude—the opportunity of thinking over her position and reviewing her own conduct. She could not conceal from herself that the impression she had made at Burrow Hall was, somehow or another, an unfortunate one. From Mary Melburn's manner, it was clear that she perceived this, and did her best to do away with it—nay, it seemed to Miss Dart that once or twice the young lady was on the point of saying something to soften, and perhaps elucidate, matters. However, she had not done so: it was plain that she was shy and nervous even in her solicitude for the other's comfort.

‘We dine in three quarters of an hour,’ she had said. ‘I will come and fetch you.’

Then, as she turned to leave the room, something in her companion's face appeared to touch her. She came back and held out her hand. ‘It must all seem very strange

and lonely to you here, but I am sure we shall be good friends.'

'Indeed, I hope so,' said Miss Dart, gratefully. She could not say, as she wished to do, 'I am sure we shall,' for her character was obstinately truthful; but the tears rose to her eyes and supplied what was wanting.

A kind word in season, how good it is! She felt at once that things were not so bad as they had seemed before it was spoken, and that she would be able to 'get on' with Miss Melburn at least, if not with her mother. Yet what had she done to make the 'getting on' with the elder lady seem so problematical? She was not unacquainted with the peculiarities of invalids, and could make allowance for them; but she could find no clue to Mrs. Melburn's annoyance and displeasure. Her best guess at it—and she acknowledged to herself it was but a poor one—was that her mistake in taking Major Melburn for his father had wounded her employer's *amour propre*. It had perhaps implied that a husband of her own age would have been more

becoming than one old enough to be her father ; but this left Miss Melburn's strange behaviour still unaccounted for, since it could not have arisen from the same cause. Though she had not expected to find a life of dependence without a thorn, she had not bargained for a hidden thorn.

CHAPTER IV.

AT DINNER.

A GIRL'S first ball is a great experience, but it is not such an ordeal as her first dinner party. In the former case, there is, mixed with her apprehensions, no inconsiderable expectation of enjoyment; whereas, in the latter, there are only tremors. I remember seeing one little lady—though by no means a child—astonish the strange gentleman who offered his arm to take her downstairs by bursting into tears. The joys of the table are exclusively for the mature. What are even turtle and venison to the maiden of blushing sixteen, or even eighteen, who must needs partake of them in unfamiliar company? Better a dinner of herbs—or, at least, of hashed mutton—where ease of manner is,

than eight courses, eaten on our best behaviour. Miss Elizabeth Dart was more than eighteen—she was, indeed, three or four-and-twenty—but she had never before made one of a dinner party. The class of society to which she had been accustomed did not affect that form of entertainment : they lunched heavily in the middle of the day, and in the evening took meat teas. Social differences of the superficial kind, it is true, did not much move her ; it was natural to her to dive below them for something of more intrinsic worth ; nor was she by any means what is commonly known as ‘ shy ’—she had a sense of proportion, a consciousness of possessing powers greatly above the average, which forbade that feeling. A large party would not have alarmed her more than a small one ; but of however many it might consist on the present occasion, she would certainly find herself the only stranger among them. If a young girl convoyed by her mother feels diffident and nervous in such a position, it was surely not to be wondered at that, having attired herself as sprucely as

her modest wardrobe permitted, it was with some flutter of anxiety that Elizabeth Dart awaited the return of the young lady who was to be at once both her pupil and her cicerone. Mary Melburn entered her room with a smile, superimposed, however, upon a grave countenance. It seemed as certain to the new governess as though she had been a witness to it, that some conversation about her had passed in the interim between mother and daughter which had been of a serious and not quite satisfactory kind.

‘Mamma is not well enough to dine downstairs to-day,’ she said ; ‘there will be no one but papa and Jefferson and one visitor.’

If this speech was, as seemed probable, an excuse for the absence of Mrs. Melburn, Elizabeth Dart was only too happy to accept it, since the presence of the mistress of the house as chaperon would, she felt, have been far from reassuring. As to the visitor, whoever he might be, he was not so formidable in her apprehensions as the master of the house ; that that gentleman was also her

employer was a circumstance, of course, which also placed her at a great disadvantage as regards ordinary young ladies making their début. It was once observed to me by a well-known writer, famous for his 'saving common-sense,' that, notwithstanding the bother made about governesses in the way of pity, no sooner do they burst into full bloom as successful school-mistresses, than we have not a civil word for them. The conclusion he drew was that our views in both cases were exaggerated, and that, even when our Becky Sharpes are all they ought to be, they are not to be so greatly commiserated. With all respect for his judgment, I still take leave to think that their position is very sad and pitiful: they are not only dependent in the ordinary sense, as respects their employers, but more or less at the mercy of any one in the house who may chance to take a dislike to them. While, on the other hand, matters become even still more unpleasant if any member of the opposite sex takes it into his head to pay them any marked attention.

The mind of Miss Elizabeth Dart, however, was of neither a morbid nor desponding cast, and though that trip on the threshold of her new home, which she had so unconsciously made, did somewhat depress her, she was resolved, if possible, to recover her lost ground, and at all events to make the best of matters.

In the drawing-room were three gentlemen, all of whom rose as the two ladies entered the room. Mr. Melburn's manner as he came forward and welcomed the new-comer to Burrow Hall impressed her favourably. His handsome face smiled upon her with benignity, and his tone, if somewhat patronising, had also something paternal in it. 'My son Jefferson, it seems, you have already seen?' The Major nodded good-naturedly; though he said nothing, his face seemed to wear an encouraging look, for which she could not but be grateful: it looked to her like a friend's face. 'Mr. Winthrop, like yourself, is from London, and has only joined our circle to-day.'

‘Sorry I did not come by the earlier train,’ observed Mr. Winthrop with an elaborate bow, ‘since I might have been of use to Miss Dart.’

What use he could possibly have been it was difficult to imagine, as Miss Dart had travelled second-class, and had needed no assistance in drinking her cup of tea ; but the aspiration was, at all events, a polite one. Mr. Winthrop, a tall, ungainly looking gentleman, with a face like a horse—it had possibly acquired the resemblance from association with that quadruped, for he was very equine in his tastes—was, indeed, the pink of politeness. When he addressed a lady, he invariably bowed, which caused the glass, always stuck in his eye, to fall out of it, and gave one the impression of something mechanical. He wore a constant smile, which perhaps from long usage had become weak, for it now resembled a simper ; and though a young man—not more than thirty at the most—his crop of hay-coloured hair was very scanty, and had deserted the uppermost and

less fertile regions of his head altogether. His loose, limited figure looked no doubt to less advantage than it otherwise would have done contrasted with the stalwart frame of the Major, or even with the erect and still shapely form of the master of the house ; but what was in stronger contrast still was the expression of his face, which was timid, and lacked the force of character which distinguished both father and son.

It was easy to see, however, that, despite these shortcomings, Mr. Winthrop occupied a high place in the estimation of both these gentlemen. His utterances, though of a commonplace kind, were listened to with great attention, and his opinions, if not very strong in themselves, had always the advantage of corroboration. Little as she knew of life, the quick-eyed governess soon came to the conclusion that Mr. Winthrop was possessed of something in the way of wealth or position that exacted homage ; but whether Mary Melburn's conduct towards him was dictated by respect, or dislike, she was not so

sure. He paid her such attentions as would have been considered marked even in a 'squire of dames,' and she received them with a frigid courtesy that might either be the acknowledgment of such patronage or a sign of its rejection.

When dinner was announced, and he offered his arm to her, Miss Dart noticed that she laid her hand on it as lightly as though it had been a broken limb, and that not a word escaped from her lips during their passage into the dining-room. Mr. Melburn himself, who was, of course, her own escort, conversed with grave condescension, and explained to her as they passed the sideboard the presence of an array of silver cups upon it, which he saw had attracted her attention.

'You must not think they are meant for drinking purposes,' he said, smiling, 'and still less that they are exhibited from ostentation ; but when Mr. Winthrop is here we like to remind him that other families besides his own have distinguished themselves in the field.'

‘Miss Dart will conclude that we have won these things in battle, Sir,’ said the Major, who was walking behind them, ‘unless you are a little more explicit. They are only coursing cups.’

The explanation was not altogether superfluous, for she had never seen such trophies of the chase, and was amazed at their size and splendour.

She had heard of ‘going to the dogs’ as a term for poverty, but it seemed to her that these animals might be a source of wealth ; her ignorance of how such things were come by was similar to that of a child who, looking into a jeweller’s shop, concludes that a goldsmith must needs be a Cræsus.

‘They must be very valuable,’ she murmured.

‘They cost a deal of money, at all events,’ said the Squire, drily. Then added, in a tone that was meant to be heard, ‘It is only men like our friend Mr. Winthrop who can afford to be successful in the coursing-field.’

In this speech, as it seemed to the gover-

ness, her host gave the keynote of the conversation. There were not many subjects besides his personal ailments, and his family tree, on which Mr. Winthrop could talk with comfort to himself, but coursing happened to be one of them. The subject was a much more generally acceptable one than it seemed likely to be, for, while it was a familiar topic to Mr. Melburn and his son, its very novelty had an attraction for Miss Dart, who was never better pleased than when acquiring information which at the same time gave her an insight into social life. As for Mary Melburn, she seemed to welcome it because it afforded her an excuse for silence while listening to the outpourings of her neighbour's enthusiasm. The ladies were but very rarely appealed to ; but, in answer to some question put to her by the Major about greyhounds, Miss Dart was obliged to confess that her sole acquaintance with them was derived from books.

‘Of course,’ she said, ‘I delight in Sir Walter’s Maida ; but that, I believe, was a deer-hound.’

‘What Sir Walter was that?’ inquired Mr. Winthrop. ‘I know a Sir Walter Ross, who courses down in Berkshire.’

‘I was speaking of Sir Walter Scott,’ she replied, not a little abashed at having been the unwilling cause of the discovery of such ignorance.

‘I always thought it strange he didn’t call the dog Salamanca,’ observed the Squire, gravely. ‘In England, we always call greyhounds—so far as the first letter goes, at least—after our own names. It would have been quite natural for me to own a Maida—I dare say you have not got a single dog, Winthrop, whose name does not begin with a “W.”’

‘There’s Wilkie, and Wentworth, and Wildrake, who won the cup from your Marrowbones at Ashdown, last year.’

‘You needn’t tell me that,’ said the Squire, ruefully.

‘You see there are some things that we can teach you, even in Downshire, Miss Dart,’ said the Major, in a low voice. His tone was sarcastic; but, as she well understood, the

sarcasm did not apply to herself. Perhaps she would rather it had done so, since it seemed to take for granted a certain contempt for her company, or, at all events, for one member of it, which it distressed her to have imputed. On the other hand, it was not displeasing to her to find some one who could enter into her feelings, and, above all, who had taken the trouble to let her know that he had done so. She felt lonely and out of her element ; and sympathy of any kind, under such circumstances, is very grateful. In addition to the strangeness of all things about her, there seemed to be a mystery of some kind brooding over matters at Burrow Hall, though it only betrayed itself in silence. It was odd, for example, to say the least of it, that not a word was dropped concerning the hostess of the house ; no expression of regret for her absence or its cause ; no hint even of her existence. The governess's reading was extensive, and had comprised many works of fiction, and she had gathered from it that the domestic affections were not so much cul-

tivated among the higher ranks as in that in which she had been accustomed to move, but that Mr. Winthrop should not have asked Mary Melburn a question about her mother's health when they first met in the drawing-room seemed strange indeed. Little by little she came to understand that Burrow Hall was one of those unhappy houses denounced in the Scriptures,—‘a house divided against itself,’ but for what reason it was so, or even into what camps it was divided, she did not learn till long afterwards.

In the meantime, having very literally started their hare, it seemed that the topic of coursing, among Mr. Melburn's guests, was never to be exhausted.

It was better than a talk about bullocks, because there was necessarily more movement, though it did not move *on* ; but to poor Miss Dart, who had never seen a hare, except in a poulterer's shop, it would have been insufferably tedious, save for a way she had, under similar circumstances, of disengaging herself from the train of talk about her like a slip-

carriage. This operation did not take the common form of dreaming, a dangerous custom which is apt to put him who practises it in an embarrassing position ; she only exchanged the concrete for the abstract, and while permitting her thoughts to range over a wider surface, still kept them sufficiently fixed upon what was going on about her. Often and often had she excited Aunt Jane's astonishment by her comments on the feelings and motives of their common friends after an evening passed in their company, where she had borne her full share in the conversation, and to all appearance had been as much absorbed in it as they were.

‘What a strange girl you are, Lizzie,’ she would say, half in admiration, half in alarm, at she knew not what ; ‘you seem to turn everybody inside out. I can’t help thinking you would make your fortune if you took to the trade of character-telling, like that romancer over the way.’

The romancer was a chiromancer on the other side of the street, who professed, by

spreading your fingers out (and probably putting his own to his nose as soon as your back was turned), to define your moral and intellectual qualities, and to suggest the profession most suitable to their exercise. This was not high praise, but perhaps (for praise when we are young goes far, and is almost as satisfactory as pudding) it had encouraged Miss Dart to continue her speculations. It was a habit at all events that had become confirmed by this time, and was destined to bear fruit, which was no more dreamt of at present than 'the music in the eggs of the nightingale.'

'Did these people talk?' she was wondering now, 'for the sake of talking, and because they had nothing better to talk about, or with a motive?' She knew that with persons of a low intellectual type, the mere use of the faculty of expression is gratifying to them. What else can explain the repetition of a remark in different words that we so often hear? But she had a higher opinion of her host's intelligence than this, and a higher one still of the Major's. The whole conversation,

she concluded, was framed to suit Mr. Winthrop : but was it to please him generally, or with a more direct object ? This riddle, which may appear uninteresting to persons who investigate double acrostics with enthusiasm, soon got to have a strong attraction for her.

‘By-the-bye,’ observed Mr. Melburn, during a short pause, ‘we must remember that to-morrow is our last day this season. I am glad to see the glass is rising.’

‘It would make precious little difference to me,’ said Mr. Winthrop, ‘if it was stuck at “much rain”—indeed, for Wilhelmina’s sake I should prefer a wet day, for her best chance is when the ground is heavy.’

‘I was thinking of the ladies,’ remarked Mr. Melburn, drily, ‘not of the dogs.’

‘To be sure,’ put in Mr. Winthrop, bowing towards his fair neighbour, and dropping his eyeglass on his dessert plate, where it fell on a slice of pear, ‘that is a sunshine we cannot dispense with. You will honour us with your presence, Miss Melburn, of course ?’

‘Thank you, no. Clappers Down is scarcely a spot for the carriage, the hills are too precipitous.’

‘Then why not ride?’ observed her father, with a frown on his high forehead, and a sharpness in his tone which fairly startled the governess: it was like the development of a new note in some familiar instrument.

‘I cannot ride alone, and run the chance of being the only lady at the meeting,’ observed Mary, quietly, ‘as happened once before. I remember your objecting to it, yourself, papa.’

Mr. Melburn bit his lip; there is no argument so unwelcome, because so unanswerable, as that which is taken out of our own mouths and used against ourselves.

‘But why should not Miss Dart ride?’ he inquired, peevishly.

The question should by rights, of course, have been addressed to Miss Dart herself; we do not generally use the third person in conversation when the first is sitting next to us; but when the Squire was crossed, his manners,

like those of many other people, were wont to lose their polish. His tone, indeed, was distinctly irritable; if his words had been paraphrased, they would, it seemed to the shrinking ears of the governess, have run thus—‘Why won’t she ride? What’s she here for but to be chaperon whether on horse or foot?’

It was plain by the blush on her cheek that Miss Melburn understood what was passing in her new friend’s mind.

‘Papa forgets, Miss Dart,’ she observed apologetically, ‘that folk who do not live on the downs as we do are not all born centaurs.’

‘I have never ridden a horse in my life,’ said the governess, quietly.

Mr. Winthrop looked at her with amazement, and for once without dropping his eyeglass. ‘Then what *do* you ride?’ he inquired, with simplicity.

‘A zebra,’ exclaimed the Major, gravely. ‘Unfortunately, however, her steed will not come in time for to-morrow.’

‘Jefferson is joking, Winthrop,’ explained

Mr. Melburn, for that gentleman's jaw had dropped in something like consternation. 'Come, let us have our tobacco.'

At this unmistakable hint the two young ladies rose at once—the Major holding wide the door for them—and repaired to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER V.

SORCERY.

IT is doubtful whether either of the two young ladies experienced much sense of relief from their escape from the dining-room. It would have been impossible for them, considering their mutual relations, to discuss the company they had just quitted ; but, in any case, the governess would have felt the topic to have been a dangerous one, for during the whole meal Mary Melburn had struck her as being hardly less ill at ease, or less in accord with those about her, than herself. At the same time, silence upon a topic so obvious was embarrassing. The consciousness of having annoyed the master of the house by her inexperience as a horsewoman also weighed upon her mind ; she felt that she had made as

unfavourable an impression upon him as his wife. After two such false starts, it seemed almost impossible that her career at Burrow Hall should run smoothly.

With her young companion herself she was better pleased than her behaviour at first had led her to expect. Miss Melburn's manner to her at dinner had been considerate, and even kind ; but even with her she felt by no means sure of her footing : while the young lady, on her part, showed none of that frankness and confidence which might have been looked for at her years. Her manner, it is true, was gentle and courteous ; but there was a coldness, or at least a caution, about it that could not be mistaken. This was the more painful to Elizabeth Dart, since from the diagnosis she had, as usual, formed of the other's character, such reticence seemed to be foreign to it.

Miss Melburn treated the new-comer rather as a visitor than one who was to be a resident with her under the same roof ; and, though solicitous enough for her comfort and amusement, made but little effort to make her feel

at home. She drew her attention to the books upon the table, to the pictures on the walls, and, finally, to that last refuge of the drawing-room destitute, the family photograph album. To Miss Dart this was a welcome object. For the faces of our friends, as being in some sort 'the company we keep,' afford an index to our own characters ; and where all is dark (and it was so with her as regarded all her surroundings), even the light of a farthing candle is acceptable.

The first picture represented the Squire himself in uniform, with his hand upon his sword, and with such an ultra-military expression of countenance as might have fitted some commander giving orders for the sack-
ing of a city.

'I did not know that your father had been in the Army,' observed the governess.

'Nor has he,' returned Mary, with a smile ; 'that is the dress of the Deputy-Lieutenant of the county.'

There is no class of people who feel their ignorance so much as those who have really

been well educated ; and at that moment poor Miss Dart would willingly have sunk through the floor and taken her chance of what lay beneath it. She nervously continued her examination of the volume, wherein the Squire still figured in various characters—dispensing justice as Chairman of the Quarter Sessions ; on horseback, with the initials ‘ M.F.H.’ under him, a mystery into which Miss Dart did not venture to inquire ; as an orator addressing some popular assembly. Over this she lingered a little (as well she might), until Mary murmured, ‘ That was when papa stood for Downshire. He didn’t get in, you know ; ’ which was another blow.

Then there came a portrait of the Major in his war-paint ; and a handsome chief he looked.

‘ That is Jefferson, of course,’ said Mary, drily. It seemed to Miss Dart that there was some reproof in the speech—which somehow brought the colour to her cheeks—because the page was not turned over on the instant.

‘ What a very lovely creature ! ’ she ex-

claimed, as she came upon the next portrait. It represented a young girl attired in a ball dress, and selecting a flower from a bouquet with grave significance. With all its youth and beauty, the face was not a happy one ; the eyes had trouble in them, and the mouth had doubt and even dread about it.

‘This is from a picture, not from life,’ observed Miss Dart.

‘It is,’ was the quiet rejoinder ; ‘but they tell me it was very like.’

‘I have never seen a face so beautiful in real life.’

‘And yet you have seen that very face ; it is the portrait of my mother when she was eighteen.’

The eyes of the speaker were suffused with tears, and her voice trembled with emotion.

‘I see the likeness now,’ said the governess, gently ; ‘I am afraid your mother must have suffered much.’

It was clear, indeed, that years alone could never have brought so marked a change.

‘She has been a great sufferer all her life,’ returned Miss Melburn, gravely.

‘Poor soul, poor soul !’ were the words that rose to Miss Dart’s lips, but they did not pass them. It struck her that a governess should not venture to be so sympathetic to her superiors ; and yet she could hardly say, ‘Poor lady, poor lady !’

To be silent must needs seem to be unfeeling ; but in the meantime the moments were fleeting by ; and with every moment speech, as is usual under such circumstances, became more difficult to her.

‘I am very sorry,’ at last she murmured ; an expression so conventional that she felt it must appear to be dictated by indifference, or perhaps even by antagonism.

‘That is my Aunt Meyrick,’ observed Miss Mary, turning the next page with her own hand, ‘with whom we are probably to stay at Casterton.’

This lady, to judge by her portrait, would be at least ten years the Squire’s junior ; there was some resemblance between them in

feature, but none in expression. The widow was less handsome, but more pleasing ; the mouth had none of the Squire's decision about it, and the eyes were gentle to timidity.

'It is a very pleasant face,' was Miss Dart's involuntary remark.

'Aunt Meyrick is a *dear*!' exclaimed Miss Melburn, enthusiastically ; 'and this is "a dear," too, in his way, though it is a very different way.'

The picture showed a dwarfish and almost deformed man, with a face full of wrinkles, redeemed by eyes of keen intelligence. His apparel was homely in the extreme. He had a disc in his hand, such as electro-biologists place in the hands of their victims before proceeding to experiment upon them.

'Now, what would you say this gentleman was—for a gentleman he is, though of humble birth?' inquired Mary, with a smile.

'Well, I should say,' said Miss Dart, after a moment's consideration, 'that he was an enthusiast ; and although an antiquarian, very

fond of at least one person who has not age to recommend her—yourself.’

‘You must be a magician, Miss Dart!’ exclaimed the other, in astonishment; ‘you have described Mr. Leyden to a nicety. If it is not contrary to the rules of the Black Art, would you mind telling me by what means you read his character so correctly?’

‘Nothing is more simple,’ returned the governess, smiling; ‘his eyes betray his enthusiasm, the antique coin in his hand suggested the nature of his pursuit, and the tone in which you spoke of him assured me of your great regard for him, which in such a case must needs be reciprocated.’

‘We are very simple, superstitious folk on the downs here,’ said Miss Melburn, smiling in her turn; ‘and if this gift of yours should be generally known, you will run some risk of being burnt as a sorcerer.’

‘Still my art has its limits, and I confess this young gentleman puzzles me,’ said the governess as she turned over the next page.

Her manner had become unconsciously natural ; the barriers, or one of them, between herself and her companion had been suddenly removed. Mary, on her part, found herself, for the first time, not only interested in, but drawn towards, the new-comer. She remained silent, watching her narrowly. The portrait was of a young man of two or three-and-twenty, slender and pale, extended on a couch, with a book in his hand, on which, however, his eyes were not fixed. They rested on the ground with a thoughtful, intent expression. The face was one of great beauty ; but, if not positively effeminate, it lacked vigour.

‘Perhaps it may help you,’ said Mary, after a long pause, ‘to tell you what somebody else remarked whose opinion was asked upon the same subject : he said, ‘That young gentleman looks like a girl in boy’s clothes, and must be uncommonly lazy.’”

‘Whoever said that,’ said Miss Dart, quietly, ‘could never have studied Lavater, nor his fellow-creatures. In the first place, it is clear that this young man is an invalid ; I

should say, by the pose of the limbs, a chronic invalid.'

The profound silence that followed this remark was broken by a suppressed sigh.

'The book,' continued Miss Dart, gravely—'though, to be sure, he is not reading it—is rather misleading. It is not the sort of book, to judge from the outside, I should have expected to see him with.'

'It is the history of the Anglo-Saxon coinage,' observed Miss Mary.

'Just so. Well, he doesn't care about the book, you see, but is only trying to read it; perhaps, to please his friend, Mr. Leyden.'

'A witch, a witch!' cried Miss Mary, clapping her hands delightedly. 'Go on; oh, please go on!'

'Well, I am not sure,' proceeded Miss Dart, with deliberation: 'I may lose my reputation as a sorceress by such a monstrous suggestion, but the Sybil within me prompts me to pronounce this young gentleman to be a poet.'

'It is marvellous—it is amazing—you are

quite right !' exclaimed Miss Mary, in a breath. 'Hush !—they are coming in from the dining-room.'

In an instant she had put back the photograph-album in its place, and turning to the piano affected to be busied with her music-book. The echoing hall was at the same time filled with voices, and the three gentlemen trooped in.

CHAPTER VI.

JEFFERSON ASKS A FAVOUR.

MR. WINTHROP looked in high spirits, and slightly flushed, the Major somewhat bored, and the Squire like a man who has been put out, and has a great objection to the process. He brushed by the governess as if she had been a piece of furniture, and took up his usual position with his back to the fire, and his arms under his coat-tails. Instead of deriving the usual satisfaction from that attitude, it was plain from the frown on his brow, and the way he looked about him, that he was in a state of discontent. His lips moved not 'as if in prayer,' but the contrary. Miss Dart even thought she caught the word 'idiot' pronounced under his breath; his eyes were at that moment fixed on the pair

by the piano, but whether the remark was applied to his daughter or his guest was doubtful: perhaps he used it as a noun of multitude.

‘And what have you ladies been doing with yourselves, Miss Dart?’ inquired the Major, in sprightly tones.

‘Nothing of a very elevating nature, I am afraid,’ she answered. ‘We have been looking at photographs.’

‘What, already?’ was his somewhat enigmatical rejoinder. ‘The Governor in his armour, eh? and our sisters and our cousins and our aunts?’

‘Not your sister. I am surprised to find her conspicuous by her absence; not, however, that she would make a good photograph, because she has so much expression.’

‘Why don’t you say what one young lady generally does say of another under such circumstances, “because her beauty lies in her expression”?’

‘Because I do not think so. To my thinking, Miss Melburn is beautiful in both

ways, only the sun seldom succeeds in catching the second way.'

'It is very kind of you to take that rose-coloured view of her.'

'Does not everybody do so?' Miss Dart's eyes involuntarily wandered, as she spoke, towards the piano, at which Miss Mary was sitting down to play, with Mr. Winthrop standing at her side regarding her, glass in eye, with evident admiration.

'He'll break that glass against the keys of the piano, I'll bet a guinea, before he's turned over half a dozen leaves,' said the Major, parenthetically. 'Well, I don't know as to everybody; brothers, you know, are not apt to be enthusiastic about their sisters' charms.'

'I should have thought, on the contrary, that they would have been the very persons to take pride in them.'

'Indeed; well, you see, I'm only a half-brother,' said the Major, smiling. 'The cousin, by-the-bye, has been trotted out, of course?'

‘The cousin? What cousin? I don’t understand you.’

‘Matt Meyrick, the poet. If the photograph book was exhibited, Mary has surely introduced you to the young gentleman.’

‘Not by name. There was, I remember, a portrait of a young man, an invalid.’

‘You may call a man so who has paralysis of the spine, I suppose; but it’s a very delicate way of putting it.’

‘Is it really so bad as that? Poor fellow!’

‘He has his compensations, however. In the first place, he has a better opinion of his own talents—I beg his pardon, of his genius—than any young man in the world. Then he is the idol of his mother. He has also an independent worshipper, a mad numismatist; and there’s Mary. There are very few people who can boast of three creatures who believe in them; I should be very glad,’ here the Major sank his voice a little, ‘to have *one*.’

‘These things depend on one’s deserts, I fancy,’ said the governess, quietly.

‘That extinguishes me altogether,’ returned the Major, smiling; but he did not look extinguished nevertheless. His air was gay and his face was bright as he stood beating time to the music, which had now begun, and he certainly looked a very handsome fellow.

The Squire, with one coat-tail under his arm, as an officer carries his sword, now began to move towards the piano with the caution of a sportsman stalking deer: he was fond of music in his way, and his dissatisfied soul seemed to become soothed by it, though his brow was still far from clear. No sooner had he departed from her vicinity than Miss Dart became conscious of a voice addressing her from above, as gently as falls the dew from Heaven. It was, of course, the Major’s voice; but, as his head was nodding to the music, and his eyes fixed on the musician, it was difficult to connect him with it.

‘This may be the only opportunity, Miss Dart, I may have to say to you,’ it murmured, ‘that, if you could reconsider your determina-

tion not to go to the coursing to-morrow, you would lay us all under a great obligation. I do not make use of the argument which would have the greatest weight with most people, that your doing so would be the shortest way of conciliating the authorities ' (here he nodded—out of time—towards the Squire) ' because I do not think you a person to be actuated by self-interest. I am asking you a favour—not a personal one, of course—but in the name of the family.'

' But how *can* I go?' inquired the governess, in great distress of mind. The manner of the application embarrassed her quite as much as the proposition itself, and yet it was perfectly respectful; moreover, though he put self-interest out of the question, she could hardly doubt from the kindness of his face that he really had her own advantage in view. ' As I told Mr. Melburn at dinner, I have never been on horseback in my life.'

' But that is one of the few things that we can teach you; you will certainly have to learn it; so why should you not take your

first lesson to-morrow morning? I can promise you the steadiest of steeds, and that if you feel the least nervous, you shall never be left by yourself even for a minute. I knew what a comfort that is when, five years ago, I first learnt to ride a bicycle.'

'But I shall shame you all with my awkwardness, and look so ludicrous.'

'I venture to differ from you there,' said the Major, gravely; 'the saddle will not seem a stranger place to you than Burrow Hall, and I prophesy that within a week you will ride like Diana. I mean, of course, Diana Vernon.'

'Well, I will speak to your sister about it,' said the governess, hesitatingly, 'and if she will take the risk of such a companion——'

'Pardon me—I would not do that,' interposed the Major; 'she has already said that she could not leave you at home alone, and I don't think she would like to lay herself under an obligation to you, as it were, by pressing the matter. Now, though to me I must confess your going or staying at home

will make a difference, I am not the principal party concerned, and have therefore ventured to plead with you. If you would tell my father to - night, without mentioning my mediation of course, that you had agreed to make one of our party to Clapper's Down, it would give him great pleasure—I wish I could say that it would do so on your account ; but the compliment would be transparent ; even if you believed me, you would not thank me afterwards for introducing you to a fool's paradise. I trust, Miss Dart, that I have not offended you by my plain speaking?'

'No, no ; it is not that,' she answered, hurriedly (for the music was already dying away); 'since it seems that the matter is really of some importance, I promise you I will go to Clapper's Down.'

'A thousand thanks! Bravo! bravo!' His two latter words were a tribute to the musician, but to his companion's ear they had a touch of triumph as well as applause. It was natural, however, that he should be grati-

fied by having overcome her scruples ; it was also ' nice of him,' though it was a mere civility, to say that her going to the meet would make a difference to him. There was not much in common, nor likely to be, between her humble self and the Major ; but in the strange and frigid atmosphere in which she found herself, his kind and frank advice came to her like a ray of sunshine on a wintry day.

When Elizabeth Dart had once given a promise, its performance, however unpleasant to herself, if it lay within her power, was certain ; and if no opportunity had offered itself of speaking to Mr. Melburn respecting her readiness to join the party to-morrow, she would, somehow or other, have made one. She had made up her mind to speak when Mr. Winthrop should have taken his departure ; but, as it turned out, that gentleman was sleeping in the house. He was still in the room when, to her surprise and confusion, Mary rose from her chair and with an ' It is getting late, and I am sure you must be tired,

Miss Dart, with your long journey,' prepared to leave the drawing-room.

The Squire's brow clouded at once ; it seemed to the governess, from the glance he cast at her, that she was for the second time incurring his displeasure.

'I hope when you have slept upon it, Mary,' he said, in a tone half of persuasion, half of discontent, 'that you will reconsider your determination with respect to to-morrow.'

'I don't see how, under the circumstances, it can well be altered, papa,' she answered, gently, with a look at Miss Dart, the significance of which, however, it was difficult to translate. It might have referred to the expedition in question, or to their going upstairs.

'I believe,' said the governess, modestly, 'that it is possible for a person, however insignificant, to interfere with the public enjoyment. Pray do not consider, Mr. Melburn, my unwillingness to venture on horseback as a refusal. Rather than spoil any one's pleasure, I will go, of course.'

The effect of the speech, though it was not impromptu, was far greater than the speaker had anticipated.

‘Come, that’s well!’ cried the Squire, with much satisfaction. ‘We are all obliged to you, Miss Dart.’

‘Yes, indeed,’ assented Mr. Winthrop, with enthusiasm. ‘She shall have one of my horses, if she likes; Clinker will carry her like a lamb.’

‘Like a lamb that is rather apt to skip, however,’ observed the Major, drily. Save to Miss Dart, who knew of course that he was prepared for it, he must have seemed to take her change of purpose with *gauche* indifference.

‘She must ride Seaman,’ said the Squire, decisively; ‘he will carry her like a rock.’

The governess noticed that Mary Melburn had said nothing, which was an embarrassing circumstance, for it was to her, and not to the gentlemen, that she had naturally looked for an acknowledgment of her offer. It was plain that it had made an impression on her; but

it could hardly have been a favourable one, for the delicate pink of her cheeks had deepened into rose colour, and from her eyes there shot a glance of pained surprise.

‘If Miss Dart wishes to go,’ she said, presently, with evident effort, ‘of course, there is nothing more to be said.’

‘Oh, but indeed I don’t wish it,’ exclaimed the governess, not without some little resentment. She felt it hard that a self-sacrifice should thus be treated as though it were a self-indulgence. ‘I only offered.’

‘What does it signify? The matter’s settled,’ said the Squire, authoritatively. ‘Remember, young ladies, we breakfast at eight to-morrow, for we must start before nine.’

‘I hope I did right,’ said the governess, gently, as she and Miss Melburn went up the stairs together.

‘There could be hardly a right or wrong in the matter,’ was the indifferent reply. ‘I was not anxious to go myself, but that you did not know.’

‘Indeed I did not,’ returned the other,

earnestly. 'I only thought that it would please your father.'

'Just so ; and so, you see, it did.'

With a hand-shake and a pleasant nod, as if to assure her that no ground for offence had been given, she left her at her door. Nevertheless, that Miss Melburn was annoyed, though it might not be with her, was clear to Miss Dart. As she sat by the fire in her cosy little room pondering on the day's events, it seemed to her that she had unconsciously given a good deal of annoyance. Her material surroundings were comfortable enough ; much more so, indeed, than any of which she had had experience. But how far rather would she have been sitting in her own little back room in her aunt's lodgings ! What sorry substitutes of genuine ease are all the appliances of luxury ; how light in the balance weigh a hundred pretty speeches against one little word of love ! Not, indeed—though there had been nothing to complain of in Miss Melburn's behaviour—that any one had been specially polite to her. No one

except the Major had even been at the trouble to take any notice of her. He had, indeed, seemed to understand her position, and, in some sort, even her feelings; and he had certainly meant her well in advising her as he had done, though the result had been disappointing. For the present, it was clear that Mary Melburn was withholding her confidence from her. The social outlook was not only unpromising, but misty. She knew not where to tread without treading on somebody's toes. How eagerly she would have welcomed some hint of how matters stood, some friendly compass for her future guidance. If she had been in Miss Melburn's place and Miss Melburn in hers, surely, she thought, she would have made some effort to make her course less difficult to her. Common humanity almost seemed to demand it; but this common humanity was, perhaps, not to be found in such superior residences as Burrow Hall. Notwithstanding these desponding thoughts, the very difficulties of her position interested her. She

had the power not only of 'getting out of herself,' so much recommended to persons in trouble by those who themselves are free from it, but of regarding herself from the outside, which is another way of saying that, though perhaps unconsciously, Elizabeth Dart was a student of human nature.

CHAPTER VII.

THE START.

‘If you please, Miss, Miss Melburn’s compliments, and she sends you a riding-habit, which she hopes will fit you,’ were the first words that fell upon Miss Dart’s ears when she awoke in the morning. It brought home to her, with painful distinctness, all the events of the preceding day, which sleep had blotted out; it was not without a sharp twinge of trepidation that she remembered the unaccustomed thing she had promised to do to oblige the Squire. She gazed at her ordinary and familiar dress with the same sort of yearning with which Joan of Arc must have surveyed the armour which she was forbidden to don.

‘If you please, Miss,’ continued the maid,

who was good-natured, simple, and, from deficiency of culture, had not the usual contempt of her class for governesses, 'if you will ring when you are ready, I will come and help you on with it.'

This offer Miss Dart accepted with effusion. The garment alarmed her ; the getting into it seemed to her like returning to long clothes. The Abigail not only performed her promise, but, when the habit was on, told her how Miss Mary was accustomed to hold it, so as to permit of pedestrianism. After one or two essays she looked much less like a swan on dry land than I have seen some young ladies similarly accoutred. As the Major had hinted, it was scarcely possible, indeed, for Elizabeth Dart to look awkward ; she had too much good sense. Even the going downstairs to the breakfast-room was effected without mishap. She found the three gentlemen alone together, arrayed in sporting costume, with knee-breeches and top-boots, an attire she had never seen out of a circus ;

her own apparel, being familiar to their eye, fortunately courted no attention.

‘I see you have screwed your courage to the sticking place, Miss Dart,’ was all the allusion the Squire made to it, as he looked up for a moment from his morning’s letters.

‘I hope it will prove so,’ she answered, laughingly ; but the jest fell apparently upon deaf ears.

‘Unless as a matter of practice,’ murmured the Major, under cover of a drooping fire of envelope flap and newspaper cutting, ‘you will find it useless to make jokes in this house. We’re a very serious family.’

The observation, so far as it suggested that the miscarriage of her little pleasantry imputed dulness to her employer, was unwelcome to her ; but, being human, she could not but be grateful to the person who had understood it.

‘It was unbecoming in me to joke at all,’ she answered, gravely.

‘Of course,’ he answered, mockingly. ‘We should revere the Squire and his relations and always keep our proper stations.’

‘I wish you would not make such a noise with that paper, Jefferson,’ exclaimed Mr. Melburn, irritably ; ‘it sets my teeth on edge.’

‘That’s only natural, since it’s the Tory organ,’ returned the Major coolly.

‘I hope Miss Mary is not, after all, going to give us the slip,’ observed Mr. Winthrop, pulling out his watch.

‘The slip ? Why should she give us the slip ?’ inquired the Squire, frowning.

‘A very appropriate metaphor for a coursing meeting,’ put in the Major, quickly. ‘So ho!’ (imitating the cry of the sportsman who sees a hare sitting) ‘here comes the pretty puss herself.’

The compliment, though well deserved—for a prettier creature than Miss Mary looked in her riding dress it would have been hard to imagine—did not seem to be appreciated by its object. Without so much as acknowledging the Major’s presence, or that of Mr. Win-

throp, who got up to greet her, she went straight up to the governess and held out her hand.

‘I owe you an apology, Miss Dart, for being so late and lazy as to have suffered you to come down by yourself. I hope,’ she added, in a lower tone, and glancing at the other’s habit, ‘that you have had no difficulties ; if you had, however, you have surmounted them famously.’

She went up to her father, and, lifting her comely head on one side, received upon her cheek the hasty smear which formed the paternal kiss.

To Mr. Winthrop, waiting patiently glass in eye, she gave her hand, but very coldly, and when he retained it somewhat beyond the usual limits, she utilised the interval to nod to her half-brother, ere sitting down before the tea-urn.

This little by-play was a revelation to Miss Dart. If Miss Mary had been a less skilful actress the governess would have known last night what, as matters were,

she had been by no means convinced of—namely, that Mr. Winthrop's attentions were unwelcome to the young lady, and that she had made her new friend's ignorance of horsemanship the excuse for evading his companionship at the coursing meeting. But the other had played her part so naturally that Miss Dart had supposed it quite possible that she had been standing in the way of her wishes, as it was evident she had been in those of the Squire.

This new knowledge melted her heart towards her pupil, since it showed that on her part the girl had something to forgive. Her coldness of the previous night was accounted for, if not excused. So thoroughly had Miss Dart's indignation evaporated that there was none left to take what would have now seemed to have been its proper direction—namely, that of the Major, to whose interference the unpleasantry which had taken place was clearly due. He, at least, could scarcely have been ignorant of his sister's feelings in the matter; but men, reasoned

the governess—no, not reasoned, said to herself—think so little of these things ; they are always slightly inclined to be selfish ; and since her going to the coursing meeting would add to his own pleasure——

‘I do believe the air of our downs has done you good already, Miss Dart,’ observed Mary, breaking in on these reflections.

Either it or something else had certainly given the governess a very high colour, which the observation considerably intensified.

‘I am sure that it is very wholesome,’ she stammered, feebly.

‘I wish we could bottle it, and sell it in London,’ said the Squire, regretfully.

‘For sleeping draughts,’ murmured the Major, drily.

‘Yes,’ assented Mr. Winthrop ; ‘the downs’ air is capital for that—especially after coursing. It is the most admirable sport in the world, Miss Dart, as Miss Melburn here will tell you.’

‘I am sure she will think it a very pretty sight,’ said Mary, indifferently.

‘There is no objection to it either,’ continued Mr. Winthrop, volubly, ‘such as women—I mean ladies—make to pigeon-shooting; there is no cruelty to animals, and so on: a most innocent pleasure, I do assure you. Ask any one who has ever tried it.’

‘The hare, for example,’ observed the Major.

In spite of her efforts, Miss Dart could not restrain a smile. It was all very well for the Major, who, under cover of his great blonde moustache, retained the gravity of a Judge; but it was very wrong of him, and hard on her. Yet, somehow, she could not be so angry with him as she wanted to be. The Squire, however, was under no such restraint.

‘Well, Sir, and what of that?’ he said, turning sharply on his son. ‘Has not man been given the fruits of the earth—I mean the beasts of the field—for his sustenance and enjoyment?’

‘Just so,’ said Mr. Winthrop, assent-

ingly ; ‘and, as everybody knows, “there is no hare so tender as a coursed hare.”’

It was no doubt by accident, but here the Major’s elbow, trembling with suppressed merriment, touched that of his fair neighbour. Between her sense of humour and her sense of what was becoming, poor Miss Dart could scarcely permit herself to breathe. Fortunately, at that moment the craunch of horses’ hoofs upon the ground drew general attention to the windows, through which could be seen the grooms and helpers leading the five horses, two of which, of course, had side-saddles.

‘That is your nag, Miss Dart—old Seaman,’ said the Squire, regarding the animals critically through his double eyeglass ; then he threw up a window and began talking to the groom about some animal not present, who had been ‘fired,’ in such a tender, regretful voice that one would have thought he had been speaking of one of his wheat-ricks.

‘Which horse did your father say was mine ?’ inquired the governess of Miss Mary,

in tones which she in vain endeavoured to render indifferent.

‘The brown one. You must not mind his being large ; he is very docile.’

‘That is what is said of elephants, Mary,’ said the Major, remonstratingly.

‘I wish it was an elephant,’ thought poor Miss Dart to herself, ‘then it would have a howdah on it instead of that thing.’ And, indeed, it cannot be denied that to a neophyte a side-saddle is not a symbol of security.

Miss Mary had already assured her friend that her mother was too ill to see her that morning till after her return, but she herself went to take leave of her. There were certain packets containing lunch to be distributed to each member of the party, and the gentlemen had to provide themselves with cigars ; so that it was twenty minutes or so before they were all assembled on the carriage-drive in front of the house and ready for the start.

Mr. Winthrop stepped briskly forward to assist Miss Mary to her horse, but losing his

eyeglass in the attempt, as usual, and fumbling to find it, she beckoned in the meantime to the groom, who, with his hand under her foot, landed her deftly in her seat on the instant. The Major stood in waiting to render the same service to Miss Dart, but perceiving the piteous look she cast from him to her gigantic steed—like a landsman who sees a mere rope thrown out to him to help him up a ship's side—led the animal at once to an old mounting-stone, which, like some altar erected to the equine race, stood on one side of the entrance-steps, and therefrom she transferred herself to the saddle without difficulty. For this thoughtful attention she felt truly grateful, and smiled her thanks on him, while he showed her how to hold her whip and reins.

‘The pommel will be a great temptation, but you must avoid it,’ he said, gravely. ‘Riding on horseback is like life itself: you must depend on yourself, and not on any extraneous aids.’

‘But if he begins to trot?’ suggested

poor Miss Dart, feeling as if she was on a mountain of the volcanic sort, the least movement of which would be fatal.

‘He never trots, it shakes his fat sides too much,’ was the encouraging rejoinder; ‘and when he canters it is like a rocking-chair—danger there is none. But be assured I shall never leave your side till you have lost all fear of it.’

As he turned to mount his own champing and impatient steed, he raised his eyes to an upper window and lifted his hat, while at the same time a demure look, almost mocking by contrast with that which he had just been wearing, came over his features. Miss Dart followed his gaze, and beheld Mrs. Melburn, in a morning gown, looking fixedly at her. On her face, too, was an expression she could not understand. It was one of pain and deep distress. Upon seeing that she was observed, however, she bowed and waved her hand with cold politeness. Before the governess could return her salute, the cortège began to move,

and with it the mountain on which she sat. She had read, of course, of the motion of the earth, and had accepted it with other scientific theories, but it was her first experience of the actual fact.

CHAPTER VIII.

COURSING.

THE coursing meetings of to-day wear a strong resemblance to those of the racecourse. The ratio in which sport and gain were wont to be mixed has become inverted, the strife is less for honour than for rewards ; even the reward is not what it was, but takes the form of hard cash ; and over ‘ the pleasant fields and farms,’ where the ‘ fine old English gentleman ’ was wont to follow his favourite pastime, are now everywhere—mingled with the other cloven hoofs—the footprints of the members of the betting ring. But even still, in out-of-the-way spots upon the windy hills, or in sheltered hollows of the down lands, there are meetings of the old kind, attended by squires and farmers only, and sometimes by fair equestrians.

The downs—which, save for a few high-placed fir clumps, or a patch of furze taller than common, are free from all obstruction to the view—seem made for such a sport. The road to Clapper's Down was uphill all the way—for which the governess thanked her stars, since it necessitated a foot-pace ; they climbed and climbed up the deep chalk road, till at last they reached the summit of a great green plateau which, unadorned itself by Nature's hand, looked down upon the varied beauties of three counties—hamlets, clustered round their grey-towered churches ; home-steads, with their compact farmyards and forests of ricks about them ; the dull blue river, glinting coldly through the as yet unclothed trees, and winding along the low meadowlands, till it hid itself in some ancient town : here and there, far off, the smoke of a railway train, but not the train itself ; nothing looked in motion, for the distance lent rest as well as enchantment to the view. The many-horsed waggons upon the open road seemed stationary, as also the nearer flocks of sheep

to the right hand and to the left, though the clear notes of their bells told a different tale.

Suddenly, in the hollow of the hill, the party from the Hall came upon a goodly sight : a body of some fifty men on horseback, preceded by a vanguard of a dozen more scattered at some distance apart, like skirmishers—the voluntary beaters for the game.

‘I see a red coat!’ exclaimed Miss Dart, whom the unaccustomed air, and the novelty of the ride and of all the objects about her, had greatly excited : since Seaman still plodded soberly on his way, her apprehensions had vanished, and enjoyment had taken their place. ‘I thought that only fox-hunters wore red coats.’

‘Quite right,’ said the Major, who was riding, as he had promised, at her bridle-rein ; ‘that is the judge of the coursing ; and between the two parties of horsemen in the turnip-field, you see another man in red on foot—that is the slipper. He holds the couple of greyhounds that are next to run in his leash, within which is a string—— See, though we are a little late, we are yet in time, like tardy

arrivals at a dinner party, for the first course. They have found a hare. Here she comes down the hill, straight for that fir plantation just below us. Now the dogs have the sight, look how they strain, and drag the slipper with them !’

Through the clear air was heard the judge’s mandate, ‘Go’; and the greyhounds, fawn and white, the very types of speed and grace, bound forward simultaneously, taking three yards of ground for poor puss’s two. There is no doubt that they will soon come up with her — but as to catching her, see how she threw them out by that sharp turn, and scuds away up the hill — that is a very different matter. Down hill, indeed, which is the way she must take, however indirectly, she has no chance; the dogs recover their lost ground, gain on her, overtake her, arch their long backs in readiness to spring, when, with another still sharper turn, like that of the wrist of a swordsman, she flies away again with her ears laid level with her back and leaves her baffled foes thirty

yards behind her. It is a species of circular sailing, which sooner or later must tire puss out; but, in the meanwhile, she approaches nearer and nearer to the plantation which is her sanctuary from the jaws of death. The greyhounds appear to be aware of this, and this time they come up with her, turn her, force her down hill as it were, before her time; the fawn dog, who is leading, with outstretched neck makes a fierce grab at her, and for his pains gets a mouthful of fur, but puss herself is through the fence and safe; not without hopes of dewy mornings yet to come next spring, and hours of snoozing in her cosy form through wintry noons.

‘Confound the beast!’ exclaimed the Major, vehemently.

‘What!’ cried Miss Dart, with indignation—her heart had been beating throughout the whole proceeding almost as fast as the hare’s—‘you don’t mean to say you are sorry she has escaped?’

‘Oh, no, no, no,’ he answered emphatically; then, after a moment’s hesitation, he

added, 'I am afraid I was not thinking of poor puss at all ; the white dog belongs to us, you see, and has lost the course.'

'But neither of them caught the hare,' she urged.

'Quite true ; but the fawn dog turned her twice to the other's once, and stuck to her all along, though he tripped at last.'

Then he explained to her how 'a turn' is when the hare swerves from her course, and 'a wrench' when she swerves still more sharply from it, and that 'a trip' is when a dog seizes the hare and fails to kill it.

She listened with an interest that amazed him ; the spectacle of a female nature easily roused to enthusiasm and greedy for things new and strange was a novelty to him, and encouraged him to pursue a topic which, truth to say, he cared little about.

'The race is by no means to the swift in these matters,' he continued, smiling. 'The judge, yonder, has to take all the circumstances of the case into account : whether the hare bends round towards one dog or the

other ; or whether one fails to catch sight of pussy at the first glance, and therefore has a bad start. Nothing escapes his consideration.'

'That is not so in human life,' observed Miss Dart, gravely.

'True ; there is no one to handicap *us* in the struggle for existence.' He looked at her very curiously for a moment, but she did not observe it ; her gaze was fixed upon the scene before her ; it seemed as though she had made the reflection to herself without expectation of any rejoinder ; perhaps the form in which he had couched his reply had been unintelligible to her, but her inattention piqued him.

'I suppose, Miss Dart, you consider that, being a soldier, I am incapable of philosophic reflections, or even of sympathy.'

'No, Major Melburn, certainly not *that*,' she answered, hurriedly, and with a faint flush. 'It did strike me, however, that we must needs regard the matter you spoke of from very different standpoints. To you, if the world does not seem the best possible

of all worlds, it nevertheless shows its sunny side. It must strike you that the doctrine of compensation—of redressing the balance—is a somewhat superfluous theory ; while to me—well, I don't complain ; but my lines have fallen in less pleasant places.'

'And yet it is said,' he answered in low tones, 'that "lightly comes the world to those who are cast in gentle mould."'

'I am afraid I can take very little comfort from that circumstance, even if it were fact,' she answered, smiling, but with a certain severity too. 'I am not made of sugar-plums, I do assure you.'

'I never supposed you were,' he answered, gently. 'I know many young ladies who are composed of that material, and you are not in the least like them.— This is a pretty sight, is it not?'

They had now almost joined the company upon the opposite hill. There had been another course, and puss had again reached the plantation in safety, round which, 'though lost to sight to memory dear,' her baffled

pursuers were vainly straining their keen eyes for her. The dogs that had not yet run were standing about in pairs, clothed (as if they had been *Italian* greyhounds) in parti-coloured garments, with only their legs and heads exposed to view, like so many miniature racehorses. Upon glossy hunters, with arching heads and champing mouths, or upon stout, sturdy cobs, rode the gentry and yeomen of Downshire—a mounted troop such as no other land could probably furnish, with here and there a grotesque exception, such as some case of obesity upon a Shetland pony, or a more independent than wealthy sportsman perched on the tottering hind legs of a Jerusalem pony. There were also half a dozen of dear John Leech's little boys upon the backs of infinitesimal ponies, all mane and tail. Here, too, rode the stewards of the meeting, with red and white ribbons at their button-holes, and with choice expressions in their mouths for folk who *would* ride over the untried ground, and start the hare when there were no dogs to follow her ; curious

it was to mark the nice gradations of treatment to which these trespassers were subjected; how the transgressing squire was expostulated with, and the erring yeoman sworn at, and the simple smock-frocked pedestrian fairly horsewhipped back into his proper place. Besides these, there were the camp-followers—heterogeneous vehicles, which could be only described, with charity, generically as ‘four-wheelers’; a plague of gigs, numerous as the flies of Egypt, and of every colour in the rainbow; dog-carts, literally dog-carts, which had carried the various candidates for the stakes from their distant kennels, or from railway stations; and a covered cart, ordinarily used by some village carrier, but filled on this occasion with creature comforts, and resembling a peripatetic public-house. The spectacle would have been interesting and exciting to almost any one, but to Elizabeth Dart it was entrancing, for it was a new page of human nature.

‘So ho!’ cries a sharp-eyed farmer; ‘there she lies under the grey grass yonder.’

How close she sits, well knowing what all this rout has come about, and determined not to stir a leg till she is whipped up. Fatal mistake, puss, surely, to lose the precious moments while thy canine enemies are scores of yards away, and the slipper does not even know of thy existence! This time it is resolved that all escape to the plantation should be cut off. The horsemen ride off to left and right and make a lane, through which she must needs run to the downs. Push forward, boys, upon your pigmy steeds to the front ; for you, too, will need all the start you can get.

Up comes the red judge upon a fresh horse, and the red slipper (poor fellow!), on the same pair of feet ; some good soul, however, presently lends him a horse to mount the hill. There is a crack of a hunting-whip, and off starts a long-legged hare straight for the down land—away go the fleet dogs, and away the regiment of miscellaneous cavalry, the elephantine Seaman and his fair burden, —to whom he imparts the equable motion of a

rocking-horse—among them, and away the four-wheels, and the gigs, and the peripatetic public-house. These last work up the least perpendicular hill, which happens to be ploughed land, like so many teams.

The stout hare holds her own ; and when the horsemen, who have been hanging on the steep like flies on a window-pane, reach the summit, the dogs and she are a mile away.

Ladies who ride to hounds are, as a rule, no more enthusiastic than are male sportsmen ; they are diffuse about dogs and horses and the details of the chase, but they feel little excitement in it save of the physical kind ; they enjoy the excursion but feel nothing of the poetry of motion it affords, beside which that of the ball-room sinks into insignificance. With Elizabeth Dart it was different, she seemed to be carried out of herself into another world ; the rush of the wind, the beat of her horse's feet upon the springy turf, was music to her ; for the moment she experienced supreme enjoyment, and her face showed it.

‘It is like champagne, is it not?’ exclaimed the Major, as he galloped by her side.

‘I don’t know,’ she answered, smiling ;
‘I never tasted champagne.’

The Major stared at her in undisguised amazement : a woman who had never tasted champagne was a phenomenon to him—nay, an anomaly. A child who had never tasted sugar would have astonished him less, though, to be sure, he knew little about children. In a general way, simplicity had no charms for him ; but in this case it had a certain piquancy. He had the sense to admire the frankness of a reply which was also a confession ; for how poor he reflected must have been the surroundings, and how humble the bringing up, of one who had attained maturity, without an experience so ordinary and matter of course !

At this moment a circumstance occurred which rather disenchanted our heroine, with respect to coursing : the hare, which had been nearing the sanctuary, a fir-grove, in the usual manner, in one of her turns—not good

enough, alas! to deserve another—got caught in the air by one of the dogs, and uttered a horrible cry of torture. Miss Dart's hands dropped the reins and flew up to her ears.

‘How can you be so rash!’ cried the Major. ‘If I had not been beside you’—for his hand had seized her bridle at once—‘you might have broken your neck!’

His apprehensions were probably exaggerated, since Seaman was an animal as little given to stumbling as to running away; but she could not but acknowledge his solicitude.

‘I did not know our pleasure was to be purchased at such a price,’ she answered. Her pupil's face, too, though she must have been used to such incidents, wore a look of distress.

‘Cried like a child, didn't she, Miss Mary?’ observed Mr. Winthrop, with the air of one who hits upon an appropriate metaphor. Her eyes spoke for her, but the girl made no reply; a shudder ran through her frame. Perhaps she was not thinking solely of the poor hare.

‘It was a shocking sight,’ she murmured.

‘It is, at all events, what all hares come to unless they’re shot,’ he answered ; and then added, with some irritation, ‘I think, too, that you might have remembered that it was my dog.’

‘That disposes of the tie, does it not ?’ exclaimed the Squire, riding up. ‘Mary, you should congratulate Winthrop.’

‘I am glad that Mr. Winthrop has won the stakes,’ she answered, mechanically. Then, turning to the governess, she exclaimed, ‘I am sure I ought to congratulate you, too, Miss Dart. How capially you have got on with Seaman !’

‘And *kept* on,’ put in Mr. Winthrop. ‘That’s rather good, Jefferson, eh ?’ and he prodded his friend humorously with the crop of his whip.

‘I think it very good,’ replied the Major ; ‘that is,’ he added, dropping his voice so that Miss Dart alone could hear, ‘for *you*.’

‘We must drink Winthrop’s health at

dinner to-night,' exclaimed Mr. Melburn, exultingly.

'Yes, and in champagne,' said the Major.

The Squire made a wry face ; there were reasons why he was inclined to be hospitable to his guest, but at the same time there are limits to hospitality.

As they turned their horses homeward, 'Did you see how the Governor's face fell, Miss Dart,' asked the Major, 'when I suggested his giving us champagne ? He is uncommonly chary of his fizz.'

'Then I think it was very wrong of you to suggest it,' she said, with severity, for she felt that it was also very wrong of him to make her the recipient of such information. 'If you knew that it would annoy your father, why did you do it?'

'Well, if you really wish to know the reason,' he answered, with a smile, 'it was on your account ; since you told me just now that you had never tasted champagne, I was determined that you should have an early opportunity of doing so.'

‘ Really, Major Melburn, you must have a poor opinion of me,’ she answered, stiffly, ‘ to suppose that I entertain any such ambition. I have no more curiosity in the way of wine than of tobacco.’

‘ Well, I have seen some very distinguished young women, with handles to their names, too, for whom even tobacco has had charms.’

‘ I neither envy them their taste nor their handles to their names,’ was the chilling rejoinder.

‘ Now don’t be angry with me,’ said the Major, penitently. ‘ I know you are quite another and very superior sort of person to them, but you did say the other evening—I mean yesterday, but somehow or other I seem to have known you so much longer—that you thought it was a good thing to have some experience of everything, big and little, so long as it was not harmful, and I thought that even champagne was not too small a thing to be left out of the category. I am awfully sorry if I have offended you.’

‘You have not offended me, Major Melburn.’

‘Nay, but it is clear I have,’ he answered, comically. ‘I am not like Winthrop, yonder, who never knows when he has put his foot in it ; at all events, be as good as to say you forgive me.’

‘Very well, Major Melburn, I forgive you.’

She looked up, and noticed Miss Mary’s eyes regarding her with the same strange expression she had noticed in Mrs. Melburn’s face when she had started from the hall that morning. There was pity in it as well as pain, she felt, but its meaning, though her wits were keen to mark the thoughts of others, was hidden from her. The physiognomists may boast as they please, but the human countenance is not, after all, so easy to translate as a Greek play with a crib.

CHAPTER IX.

CONFIDENCE.

MISS DART had just exchanged her habit, or rather Miss Melburn's, for her ordinary attire, when that young lady knocked at her door. 'Mamma would like to see you if quite convenient,' she said, 'before you go downstairs.' Her voice was very gentle, but it was not cordial; and it was for cordiality that the governess yearned. Her nature was anything but parasitical, it did not require anything to cling to; it could live, 'suffer,' and even 'be strong,' without sympathy, but it could not be happy without it. There are some plants the roots of which, if they find themselves in arid soil, will elongate and stretch in all directions for water, without which they cannot flourish, though they can

exist. Elizabeth Dart was one of them. She had no fear of being treated unkindly at Burrow Hall, nor even with neglect (though neglect she could have borne); but she was keenly conscious that she had failed as yet in gaining the confidence of her pupil. It was this, above all things, when she had accepted her present situation, that she had made up her mind to secure; and to know that she had failed filled her with discouragement. She had had, as pupil-teacher in a large school, a considerable experience of girls, and whenever she had tried to make one of them her friend, had succeeded. With others she had not tried, not because she felt the labour would have been thrown away, for she had too strong a sense of duty to spare herself, but because her intuition informed her that the thing was impossible.

In the case of Mary Melburn she felt no such conviction, and that circumstance distressed her the more. Had the girl been cold and cross, grudging, insolent, or artificial, friendship would have been out of the ques-

tion, and there would have been nothing for it but to earn her salary by unsweetened toil, as had happened to hundreds in her position; but notwithstanding some shortcomings, or what had seemed to be such, in Mary Melburn's behaviour to her, she was convinced that she had a good disposition and all the capabilities for friendship. It was hard, therefore, that the door of mutual understanding was closed between them, and the key hidden from her, or out of reach. Of Mrs. Melburn, on the other hand, she had no such good opinion. She had a suspicion that that lady, if not an hypochondriac, was not so ill as she affected to be, while she claimed all the privileges of a confirmed invalid. That this, at all events, was the opinion of others seemed certain, or surely some notice would have been taken of her condition by the male members of her family. Even their guest, to whom she was probably well known, had not given himself the trouble, as she had noticed, to inquire after her health that morning. It was, therefore, with no enviable feel-

ings that Elizabeth Dart found herself for the second time in her employer's boudoir.

Mrs. Melburn, as before, was on the sofa, but fully attired ; indeed, from her appearance, the governess judged, and indeed rightly, that she intended to present herself that evening at the dinner-table below-stairs. Her dress became her admirably, and heightened her undeniable charms ; but, on the other hand, it increased the delicacy of her appearance—as virgin white and wreaths of flowers, with which reverent hands would fain decorate the youthful dead, only the more proclaim mortality. As Miss Dart looked at her, she reproached herself with having imputed the pretence of illness to one so manifestly weak and frail. There was firmness, if not vigour, however, in the calm clear tones in which Mrs. Melburn saluted her, and immediately afterwards addressed her daughter.

‘I wish, Mary, to say a few words to Miss Dart alone, or rather in Dr. Dalling’s presence only.’

The governess followed the direction of

her eyes and perceived, as Mary withdrew, that there was still a third person in the room. A man of gigantic stature was standing in the shadow of the window-curtain, with his hands behind him, regarding her with great intentness. He inclined three feet or so of his frame as his name was mentioned, but remained silent. The afternoon light fell full upon herself and revealed every feature. She felt at once that this gentleman's opinion would presently be passed on her in a non-professional sense ; that she had been sent for on approval, or what was quite as likely to prove the reverse. It was borne in upon her quick intelligence that the unfavourable judgment which her employer had already formed of her was to be confirmed, or not, according to the view which the family physician might take of her. It would be something much more serious than inconvenience, if she were thus to lose her first situation, and so immediately, but this consideration in no way affected her behaviour or the course of conduct she intended to pursue ; for, with all

her cleverness, she was incapable of playing a part that was not her own. As she stood beside her employer's couch, with her head slightly thrown back and a quiet air of respect, that was also self-respect, in her bright, clear eyes, she might have realised, if not altogether in Wordsworthian fashion, a poet's idea of 'Resolution and Independence.'

'I have sent for you, Miss Dart,' said the invalid, in low but very distinct tones, 'in consequence of a certain change of circumstances which affects us both.'

Here she paused; and the governess inclined her head with unchanged face, but with a heavier heart. From this exordium she judged that her dismissal had been decided on, and was already picturing to herself Aunt Jane's distressful face, and the re-commencement of old troubles known but to the poor, who only ask leave to work, and yet find it so difficult to obtain permission.

'My state of health, as Dr. Dalling informs me to-day, is even less satisfactory than he had supposed it to be, and will, therefore, in

all probability, necessitate my going abroad at a still earlier date. My daughter's departure for Casterton will therefore be proportionately hastened ; in fact, it may take place immediately, and the question is, whether you are qualified not only to fill the post of her friend and companion, but also, in some measure, to take charge of her in my place ? ' She paused ; but as it was clear she did so from physical causes—the effort of speaking with such gravity and distinctness—the other held her peace.

‘ You are very young,’ she continued—‘ a circumstance with which you may justly say I was already acquainted ; but from the excellent certificates——’

‘ Testimonials,’ suggested a voice from the window-curtain, surprisingly soft and gentle to emanate from so huge a frame ; ‘ it is we doctors who grant certificates, and—unlike this young lady's—always of disability.’

‘ I beg your pardon, Miss Dart,’ resumed Mrs. Melburn, with an obvious increase of kindness in her tone. ‘ I was about to

remark that from the testimonials I had received with you, I had been led to imagine that I should find in you not only an agreeable and elevating associate for my daughter, but one somewhat more staid and judicious—not that an old head upon young shoulders is to be expected.’

There was another gentle murmur from the curtain.

‘Or even, as Dr. Dalling suggests, “to be desired” ; but in this respect I have been a little disappointed.’

‘I am very sorry,’ said the governess, gently, ‘and the more so since, not being conscious of any shortcoming in the matter you mention, I scarcely know how to guard against the repetition of my offence.’

‘There is no offence, Miss Dart,’ answered Mrs. Melburn, hastily. ‘Things have turned out a little unfortunately, that is all—accidents will happen’—here she hesitated, it was plain that embarrassment had caused her to wander into unaccustomed platitude.

‘Of course they will,’ put in the friendly

voice. 'If accidents did not happen, what would become of the doctors? If I may say a word, Miss Dart, as a very old friend of Mrs. Melburn's, and one whom she is so good as to put some faith in as an adviser, I would venture to suggest that from no fault of your own you have not thoroughly comprehended her position. Unhappily, through illness—and—and—other causes, she is unable to exercise that supervision over her daughter which, as a mother, she would wish to use, and her duties in this respect will fall upon your shoulders. I need scarcely tell you, for even from the little you have seen of her you must needs have arrived at that conclusion yourself, that Miss Mary wants no "looking after" in the conventional sense; she does not require control or even guidance; but she does stand in need of sympathy and a certain guardianship such as might be looked for in an elder sister.'

'An undivided attention,' observed Mrs. Melburn, with the air of a person who,

having been at a loss for the right word to use upon an important occasion, has found it at last.

The governess flushed to her forehead.

‘Mrs. Melburn is very far from imputing any neglect to you, Miss Dart,’ went on the friendly voice; ‘but, in the necessary absence of her mother, or, indeed, of any female friend, Miss Mary finds herself in some degree isolated; her position demands not only an adviser, but I may say a protector.’

Mrs. Melburn nodded her head in approbation and adhesion.

‘You would doubtless reply,’ continued the doctor, ‘if circumstances permitted you to speak plainly upon so delicate a matter, that you can scarcely understand how a young lady in her father’s house can be so placed; but, nevertheless, such is the case. It is plain, therefore, that your responsibility will be the greater when—as will happen almost immediately—she leaves that house. In telling you this much, I need not say, Miss Dart, that Mrs. Melburn is placing the greatest

confidence in you, which she feels sure you will not abuse.'

If the governess could have caught sight of her employer's face, it must needs have caused her to accept this last statement with what journalists term 'some reserve'; for it was aghast with terror and dismay. Her own eyes, however, were cast upon the ground; her heart was touched by the doctor's simple and manly appeal; she felt full of tenderness, pity, and gratitude—all quickened by a vague sense of self-reproach.

'I am deeply sensible,' she replied, 'Dr. Dalling, of the frankness with which, through your mouth, Mrs. Melburn has been so good as to treat me. It shall be my earnest endeavour henceforth to prove myself worthy of her confidence.'

'I was certain of it from the first,' observe! the doctor, laconically.

'You are always right,' murmured Mrs. Melburn, unconscious that that naïve rejoinder implied a previous disagreement on the point.

Once more she addressed herself to the

governess, but in a much more assured and natural tone, like one who feels that the ground is cleared of certain obstacles that might have appeared insurmountable.

‘When you are at Casterton, Miss Dart, which you soon will be, you will remember, please, that my daughter is solely in your charge; and that no matter what pressure may be put upon you, you have my authority for prohibiting——’

‘I would scarcely say prohibiting, Mrs. Melburn,’ interposed the doctor, gently; ‘it suggests a necessity which surely can hardly arise.’

‘I wish I could feel that,’ answered the invalid, drily. ‘Let me say, then, generally, Miss Dart, that you have my authority for protecting my daughter from all attentions that may be distasteful to her.’

Miss Dart bowed her head in respectful assent. She could not doubt but that the person she was thus exhorted to keep at arm’s length—and further—was Mr. Winthrop. The imposition of such a task was a matter

of much significance, for it was plain that, in so doing, her employer was not only placing a great responsibility in her hands, but also *herself* in her hands. She was taking it for granted that the governess would be henceforth not only her friend but her ally. So confident was she that she would not prove traitress, that she had, as it were, intrusted her with the key of the citadel. Nothing could, so far, be more flattering. On the other hand, Miss Dart could not conceal from herself that Mrs. Melburn had not had much choice in the matter. Since her departure was so immediate, it was scarcely possible for her to make other arrangements—to procure a new governess, for example. It was also clear that she had not taken so important a step without seeking the advice of another; or, indeed, what seemed quite as likely, that other might have persuaded her to take it. But for the interposition of that favouring and gentle voice, like an Eolian harp placed in the window, it even seemed possible that the interview might have had a different

ending. The main business once concluded, however, everything else went fair and free, like a ship before the wind.

‘You will find my sister-in-law, Mrs. Meyrick, most kind. Her mode of life is very quiet ; but her little cottage is a Home,’ continued Mrs. Melburn, after a pause. Was it fancy, thought the governess, or did she detect a tinge of bitterness in that last sentence? Did there lurk in it an involuntary comparison between Mrs. Meyrick’s humble residence and Burrow Hall? If it was so, surely this poor lady, whatever might be her faults, was to be pitied. It is not only those who shiver on our inhospitable doorsteps in the winter nights who are the homeless.

‘I don’t think there is anything more to be said,’ observed Mrs. Melburn, with a glance at her counsel.

‘Certainly not,’ said the doctor, decisively ; and as the governess left the room he waved his hand to her, with a look of approbation and encouragement.

CHAPTER X.

‘THE BOY.’

WHEN, an hour or so afterwards, Miss Dart descended into the drawing-room, she found the master of the house and the Major attired for dinner, and Dr. Dalling hat in hand. All three had the air of being engaged in grave conversation. She would have retired hastily, but Mr. Melburn called her back.

‘We are discussing no secrets,’ he exclaimed, in sharp and petulant tones; ‘pray come in, Miss Dart—— Then you really won’t stop and dine with us, doctor?’

‘Thank you, no—not to-day,’ was the quiet reply.

The invitation, or the repetition of it, as it struck the new-comer, was not very pressing, and the rejection of it unnecessarily

positive. As the doctor left the room, he bowed to the governess with stately courtesy, very different from his style of farewell above-stairs.

‘By-the-by, I forgot you two have not been introduced to one another,’ said the Squire.

‘Nevertheless, I have had the pleasure of seeing Miss Dart before.’

‘Just so—I forgot. We had the first sight of her through the window, had we not?’ returned Mr. Melburn, with a forced laugh.

To the governess this explanation was unintelligible, but what she well understood was that the doctor on his part did not wish to claim further acquaintance with her; a circumstance which corroborated her suspicion that the family at Burrow Hall were divided into two parties, and that she had already been enlisted by one of them.

‘I don’t believe half that fellow said,’ observed the Squire, vehemently, as soon as the door had closed behind the doctor.

It was an observation injudicious indeed for him to have made before an almost entire stranger ; but when the master of Burrow Hall was ' put out,' it was not in his nature to be reticent. The Major stole a glance, half horrified, half humorous, at Miss Dart, as he replied respectfully: ' At all events, Sir, you have done the right thing. It was impossible, after the expression of an opinion so decided, and coming from such a quarter, for you to have arrived at any other conclusion.'

' It's all very well for you to take it so philosophically,' returned the squire, snappishly ; ' but supposing I was to say, " Well, I can't go myself, but I will send Jefferson to take care of you." '

' In that case,' was the dry rejoinder, ' I think it just possible, Sir, as in the case of the cheap sherry recommended for the gout, that Mrs. Melburn would reply: " Rather than take that prescription, I prefer to remain ill, and at home." '

At this moment Mrs. Melburn, leaning

on her daughter's arm, entered the room ; the Squire stepped forward with outstretched hand as if to greet some invited guest. 'Is not this rather rash, considering what the doctor has been telling me, my dear?' he observed, in cold remonstrance.

'He gave me his permission,' she answered ; 'and since it seems my stay at home is to be so limited, I could not resist taking advantage of it—— Thank you, I feel no worse.'

The last sentence was addressed to the Major, in reply to some murmured inquiry about her health, and was delivered in icy tones. As she was about to take her seat, Mr. Winthrop entered. Her presence evidently took him by surprise ; he cast a hurried glance of dismay at the Major, met by an amused smile, and, dropping his glass, expressed confusedly his pleasure at seeing his hostess below-stairs.

'I had feared,' he said, 'from the accounts Mr. Melburn gave me, that I was not to see you during my present visit.'

'As I am going away so soon, I could not

bring myself to pass my evenings in separation from my daughter any more,' she said.

' That is not a very complimentary remark as regards the rest of us,' observed the Squire, with frowning brow.

' I think, under the circumstances, a very natural one, my dear ; and as you yourself are to be the companion of my journey, you have no cause to complain of it.'

' That's one for Winthrop and me, and you, Miss Dart,' returned the Major, in low tones. ' I know no one who can " put in her left " more neatly than my excellent step-mother.'

If Mrs. Melburn's air was not aggressive, it was indeed, for an invalid, decidedly combative. With her arm still resting on that of her daughter, she seemed to repel Mr. Winthrop's polite advances like a hen who shelters a chicken under its wing.

' Come,' she said, as dinner was announced, ' I must leave you gentlemen to divide Miss Dart, and exercise the privilege of an invalid by choosing my own partner.'

She was on her way to the dining-room

with Miss Mary before Mr. Winthrop could oppose a word of remonstrance. He bit his lip and looked exceedingly annoyed ; but the Squire stepped up to him and, whispering in his ear something that smoothed his brow, linked his arm in his and led him briskly out.

There was nothing for it but for Miss Dart to take the Major's arm, which he offered in the most natural way, and without the least touch of ceremony.

‘Ours is a genial family, is it not?’ he said. ‘It is said to be very old, and I have a theory that it began in the glacial period, and has never quite got rid of that atmosphere.’

‘You should not speak of your family like that to me,’ replied the governess, severely ; ‘it is not right.’

‘I am so sorry,’ he answered, penitently ; ‘you scold me so often that I seem to be always forgetting myself. Yet, if you knew the temptation it is to be natural when one has found a human being who can really sympathise with one——’

‘ But I do not sympathise with you, when——’

‘ Pray do not say that,’ put in the Major, pleadingly ; then, with a rapid change of voice, he added, ‘ Come, there are the long glasses which mark the presence of the Boy.’

The governess looked puzzled, as well she might.

‘ I say, Winthrop,’ he continued, ‘ here’s a young lady who does not know that “ the Boy ” means champagne.’

‘ Impossible !’ replied that gentleman, with an air of amazement. ‘ What do you think of that, Miss Melburn ?’

‘ I can only say that, until this moment, I shared Miss Dart’s ignorance,’ was the quiet reply.

‘ Good Heavens !’ ejaculated Mr. Winthrop. There was so considerable a mixture of contempt in the tone, that the Squire was nettled on his own account.

‘ You town gentlemen must excuse our country simplicity,’ he said ; ‘ but we are not in the way of hearing London slang.’

‘What, Sir! do you mean to say *you* didn’t know it?’ exclaimed Mr. Winthrop, unconscious of reproof. ‘Think of that, Jefferson! Thank you, no—no sherry’—to the butler—‘when I see champagne, I am a one wine man. I drink it right through, after dinner and all.’

The Squire groaned.

‘What’s the matter, Sir?’ inquired Mr. Winthrop, whom the very sight of his favourite and accustomed liquor seemed to inspire with eloquence.

‘I think I felt a twinge of the gout,’ replied his host, apologetically.

‘Then taste “the Boy”—he’ll bring it out for you. Gout carries away everything.’

‘Thank you, I don’t want it to carry *me* away,’ was the curt rejoinder. The host had brought up two bottles from his hoarded store, but in fervent expectation that one would suffice. Should his guest carry out his full intentions, it was obvious this expectation would not be realised if he took any champagne himself. He was by no means penurious or inhospitable, but he had been

brought up in an old-fashioned school, and looked upon champagne as a luxury.

‘ It is as good as a play, and I see you are enjoying it,’ murmured the Major to his neighbour.

‘ I really do not know what you mean,’ replied Miss Dart, it must be confessed a little mendaciously ; for her sense of humour had compelled her to take in and appreciate the whole situation.

‘ I suppose Dr. Dalling would veto your taking ever such a little glass, my dear ? ’ observed the Squire to his wife.

‘ It has no temptation for me,’ she answered quietly.

‘ Ah ! that means it’s not iced,’ exclaimed Mr. Winthrop, with an air of conviction. ‘ I’ve noticed that all women—I mean ladies—like their champagne iced. That’s a mistake when it’s really good. Now, so far as I have gone with it—for one can seldom pronounce with certainty upon the first taste—this is very good champagne, Jefferson.’

‘ I rather think it is,’ replied the Squire,

drily. 'Though it is not, in my opinion, a wine to go well with soup and fish.'

'My dear Sir, good wine goes well with everything, only better with some things than with others. Some say champagne should never be drunk with the sweets. That's rubbish : the French always do it, and they ought, I suppose, to know.'

'I hate the French,' exclaimed the Squire, parenthetically.

'So do I,' continued Mr. Winthrop ; 'they speak such a vile language. Not so bad as German though. That reminds me, Mrs. Melburn, that you are going to Germany in a day or two.' He raised his glass and looked towards her. 'I hope you will have a good time.'

As addressed to a person seriously, if not hopelessly ill, and going abroad for her health, the aspiration was hardly an appropriate one. Mrs. Melburn, however, acknowledged it by a frigid bow.

'Miss Mary, will you do me the honour of taking a glass of champagne with me ?' inquired the guest.

‘ She never takes champagne,’ put in the Squire, hastily. ‘ She is too much afraid of our hereditary enemy.’

Mr. Winthrop stared at the speaker through his eye-glass. ‘ That’s beyond me,’ he said : ‘ it sounds like something from the catechism.’

‘ Probably the Mohammedan catechism, which forbids the juice of the grape,’ observed the Major. ‘ Here’s another young lady with scruples. Mrs. Melburn, pray use your influence with Miss Dart to induce her to take a little champagne.’

‘ If you like it, I hope you will take some,’ said the hostess, addressing the governess with a smile.

‘ But she doesn’t know whether she likes it or not,’ explained the Major ; ‘ she has never tasted such a thing in her life.’

‘ Well, I never ! ’ exclaimed Mr. Winthrop, knocking the table with his fist. ‘ That would astonish some of our London friends, would it not, Jefferson, eh ? ’

‘ Not more than some of our London

friends sometimes astonish us,' observed the Major, sharply. 'Do you intend to make any stay in Paris, Sir?' he inquired, turning to the Squire, 'on your way to Schwanbeck?'

'I think not. We shall probably go by Brussels.'

'She is not taking any?' observed Mr. Winthrop, pointing to Miss Dart's untouched wine-glass; 'she has only pretended to take some.'

'You have been to Schwanbeck before, have you not, Mrs. Melburn?' inquired the governess.

'Come, I say, Jefferson, keep your legs to yourself,' exclaimed Mr. Winthrop, in agonised remonstrance.

The Major went on eating with imperturbably complacent face. He was saying to himself, 'I have caught him on the very place I tried for—the shin.'

Miss Dart rightly guessed what had happened, and was by no means angry with the aggressor. There are certain social out-

rages which, like diseases, require desperate remedies—the actual cautery.

‘Oh yes ; I know Schwanbeck well,’ returned the hostess, in low tones. ‘It is a beautiful valley, through which a rocky river runs, and surrounded by wooded hills.’

‘And a precious dull place too,’ observed the Squire, by way of commentary.

‘Yes ; it is very dull,’ assented the lady. It had not seemed dull to her once, when she had stayed there in comparatively good health with Mary, and with a husband not hopelessly estranged ; but now she looked to revisiting it with melancholy forebodings. As ‘a sorrow’s crown of sorrows’ is remembering happier things, so there is no place so dispiriting as one we have known under happier auspices, and with which, when weak and ill, and unaccompanied by those who made its sunshine, we are once more compelled to make acquaintance. When those associates are dead, indeed, it affords to some natures a melancholy pleasure to haunt the spots they once enlivened with their presence ; but Mrs. Melburn had

not even that poor solace ; she was leaving the one being she loved—though the time she had to spend with her on earth must needs be brief—and going, for her dear sake, into voluntary exile.

The thought of it made her bruised heart heavy, and to speak of aught else cost a painful effort. She was unaware, as yet, of what was obvious to his male companions, that Mr. Winthrop was drinking more than was good for him, and his loquacity only annoyed her, as in the case of one who in melancholy mood wanders at noon in some congenial pine-wood, and is troubled by the chatter of the jay.

Mary Melburn guessed the feelings that were agitating her mother's breast ; but sympathy made her silent—indeed the circumstances in which she was placed almost enforced silence upon her ; and Miss Dart arrived at the truth, or something like it, by intuition. If her hostess had been alone, she would have left her to her meditations ; but as meditation was impossible, she judged

that some topic of interest, such as she had perceived Schwanbeck to be, would be a relief to her ; moreover, though she had no experience of the genus Winthrop, she understood that it was necessary to make conversation, if only to keep it out of that gentleman’s hands.

She accordingly addressed her hostess on the subject of the German Brunnen, a topic with which she showed herself so familiar that Major Melburn presently observed, ‘ I suppose it was your modesty, Miss Dart, that led us to infer that your knowledge of the German tongue was acquired in England ? ’

‘ One has only to have a cold in one’s head,’ put in the Squire, testily, ‘ to talk like a native.’

‘ You seem to be of the opinion, Sir, of the gentleman who said, “ He spoke all civilised languages, and also German,” ’ observed the Major.

These interpolations saved Miss Dart from the necessity of acknowledging that she had never set foot on foreign soil ; to have done

so, she felt, would have been almost a confession of deceit, for the truth was, she had the rare gift of so assimilating what she had read, that it almost placed her in the same plane with those who had seen.

‘I want some more champagne,’ observed Mr. Winthrop, tinkling his dessert-knife against his wine-glass impatiently. ‘You may say what you like about German—hic—I mean hock—but there’s nothing like “the Boy,” except of course’—here he cast a glance of gallantry at Miss Melburn—‘the other boy, Cupid.’

With a quiet bow to Miss Dart, Mrs. Melburn rose from table and the ladies trooped out of the room.

As Miss Dart preceded them through the hall, she heard a passionate murmur from Miss Melburn, and the quiet rejoinder of her mother, ‘I am not sorry it has happened, Mary, since your father can no longer plead ignorance of his real character.’

In the drawing-room, not a word was said respecting Mr. Winthrop; though now and

again conversation was involuntarily suspended when certain sounds were heard—loud laughter, the fragments of a song, and voices raised in anger—from the dining-room. All that had taken place in that apartment, though so importunate in the thoughts of each, was ignored by the tongue. Under such circumstances talk is apt to be hurried and precipitate ; the first words that come to the lips are preferable to silence, as when horses are running away down hill an increase of speed, with all its attendant risks, is sometimes less dangerous than to stop. Through these otherwise untoward circumstances it came to pass that the governess found her employer easier to get on with, and less reserved than had hitherto been the case. Perhaps Mrs. Melburn had noted how Miss Dart had come to her rescue on a recent occasion, and was not unconscious that she was now doing her best to smooth matters, but at all events her manner was, by comparison with what it had been, frank and almost familiar.

Happening to speak with curiosity of a

book which Miss Dart had in her possession, the governess ran up to her room to procure it. On her way down, the dining-room door was flung open, and the sounds of angry altercation overflowed into the hall. She paused upon the landing, scarce knowing whether to retreat or to go on, and, unseen herself, became an involuntary listener to what was said.

‘I tell you that nothing ails me—I am “fit as a fiddle,”’ remonstrated a voice, that, but for the limited area of possibilities, she might have failed to identify ; as it must needs be one of three, however, she recognised in the owner of those husky and recalcitrant tones Mr. Winthrop. She seemed even, somehow, to become aware that he had dropped his eyeglass, and was feebly fumbling for it.

‘You do not know what is good for you,’ returned the Major, in half-grave, half-bantering tones. ‘As your friend and adviser, I prescribe bed.’

‘Never go to bed till small hours ; rule I make,’ was the uncompromising reply. ‘No-

thing so good for one as ladies’ society after dinner, brush off the cobwebs—beeswing I mean—elevate the mind.’

‘You’re much too elevated already, my good friend, for ladies’ society.’

‘Not a bit of it. Like a fellow all the better for high spirits. Seen me in them before—that is, your mother has—I mean your half-mother, your step-mother, your mother-in-law.’

‘My sister, however, has not had that pleasure,’ was the dry rejoinder.

Here one of the speakers shifted his position, and Miss Dart caught sight of the Major’s resolute face as he stepped between his friend and the drawing-room door. She shrank into the extreme angle of the landing, in terror lest he should catch sight of her.

Mr. Winthrop made some rejoinder, which, save for the two words ‘Miss Mary,’ did not reach her ear, and then once more came the Major’s voice, this time much more severe and even menacing.

‘There is also another young lady there,

sir, who is quite unused to see gentlemen forget themselves.'

'Pooh, pooh, the governess! Why, you old fox'—here there was a sort of smothered snigger.

'Another word, sir'—this in suppressed tones of intense passion—'and I will strangle you outright! To your kennel, you cur!'

There was a short struggle, a shuffle of feet upon the tiled floor as of a man pushed backward by irresistible force, and then a door closed with a crash. The hall was empty.

CHAPTER XI.

COMPROMISED.

MISS DART trembled, but not now with terror : it was rather with excitement. Experiences of human life were welcome to her, and if she felt disgust at what had happened on one account, it was not unmixed with something akin to admiration on another. The display of physical strength when exerted on the side of morals is always attractive to the female mind, and this is certainly not the less the case when its exercise has any personal application ; she could not doubt that it was some disrespectful reference to herself on Mr. Winthrop's part that had been cut short so summarily. Under circumstances that might well have aroused his vehement indignation, the Major

had not forgotten that when the dining-room door had closed upon the Squire he had succeeded to his father's place as host ; but when the other's conduct grew outrageous, he was surely not to blame for having applied the only argument—that of force—which could be made effectual or even intelligible. He had been patient, firm, and, so far as she herself was concerned, it might be even said chivalrous.

She brought down her book, and conversed upon it with Mrs. Melburn with tolerable self-possession ; it was certain that Mr. Winthrop would not put in an appearance, so that she was under no apprehension of a scene ; but nevertheless, it was with some feeling of discomfort that she awaited the arrival of the two other gentlemen. Mr. Melburn was the first to appear ; he came in rubbing his hands in a nervous fashion, and complaining of the cold ; his daughter happened to be engaged on some knitting of the philanthropic sort. 'Busy as a bee as usual, Mary,' he said, kindly,

‘in making honey for others.’ It was not exactly honey, but one cannot expect metaphor to fit all the way round like a woollen sock, which, as a matter of fact, was the article she was engaged upon; then he took his usual station on the rug, but in the reverse position: his face was fixed upon the fire, in which, when we are thoughtful, so many of us find attraction; and his fingers beat upon the mantelpiece a mechanical and monotonous tune. After a considerable interval, the Major followed, indifferent-eyed, and looking even more spick and span than usual. Miss Dart noticed that his white cravat had been changed. He came up to where she was sitting with Mrs. Melburn, and said, ‘Poor Winthrop has gone to roost; his day on the downs has tired him out. If I had won three prizes out of seven I believe I should have been as fresh as paint; but I have never had his luck, so cannot tell what effect such pleasurable excitement might have had upon me.’ The speech was so obviously prepared and apologetic that it was almost an

insult to the understanding of those to whom it was addressed. Without deigning to reply to it, Mrs. Melburn rose at once and joined her daughter ; the governess remained, but in silence.

The Major took the book she had been engaged with out of her hand, and, as though he were making some remark upon it, observed, ‘ You do not believe one word I have been saying.’

‘ I believe you sometimes,’ she answered, quietly. ‘ When, for instance, you told me that the air of the downs was intoxicating.’

‘ There is nothing like frankness,’ he answered, grimly. Then in the tone of one who dismisses an unpleasant subject for a pleasant one, he added, ‘ I trust you and Mary are not going to run away from us when the Governor and Mrs. Melburn go ?’

‘ Most certainly we are ; how could it be otherwise ?’ she answered, stiffly.

‘ Well, at all events, don’t be angry with me. I really see no harm in Mary and you being left here under her brother’s protection.

Then we shall have only two more days together at Burrow Hall ?'

'Not one ; your sister and I go to Caster-ton to-morrow.'

'To-morrow ! Why is that ?' he inquired, sharply.

'Well, at all events, to use your own words, "Don't be angry with me,"' returned Miss Dart, smiling ; 'it has been so arranged, I believe, this evening, because Mrs. Melburn wishes to see us both safely off and out of the Hall—if you were a housekeeper yourself, you would understand it—before taking her own departure.'

'A very pretty arrangement,' he observed, sardonically.

'I think it is a very natural one,' she answered, drily.

His manner piqued her ; however annoyed he might be at recent events, he had no right to vent his irritation on her.

'Perhaps you think it even a pleasant one ?' he inquired, gravely.

'Well—no ; I have no wish to leave

Burrow Hall, nor to go to Casterton : a governess ought to have no wishes.'

'You know what is said of a cottage with a double coach-house ?' he answered.

'Yes ; but I do not admit the application.'

'You know, I suppose, that Casterton is not very far away ; or else I might reasonably complain, if not of your pride, of your hard-heartedness, Miss Dart. If you thought you were never going to see me again, you would have the common politeness, I hope, to say, "I am sorry."'

'But I am coming back, as I have every reason to believe, when Mrs. Melburn comes back.'

'But that may be months hence—her return is quite uncertain—and even when you do come back I may not be here. A soldier is not his own master any more than you are.'

'What is it that I ought to say, Major Melburn?'

'Well, you might say, "I hope you will be coming over to see your sister before long."'

That does not seem to be stretching politeness very far.'

'If you come over to Casterton, we shall, of course, be glad to see you.'

'Why do you say "we"? You are not a royal personage, nor even an editor; why can't you say "I shall be glad"?''

'Very good; so be it.'

'You see, Winthrop and I will be staying on here for some time, and nothing would be easier—or, to use your own phrase—more natural, than that we should come over together.'

'I shall not be glad to see Mr. Winthrop,' answered Miss Dart, decisively.

'I did not ask you to be; that is some one else's affair, not yours.'

'Pardon me, but it is mine. As Miss Melburn's governess, I shall recommend her not to receive Mr. Winthrop's visit.'

The instant she had spoken she perceived her mistake. In thus disclosing the duty that had been imposed upon her, she was not only

betraying Mrs. Melburn's confidence, but possibly doing an immense deal of mischief.

'Oh, that's it, is it!' said the Major, bitterly.

His handsome face, for the first time, seemed to be set against her; he looked not only exceedingly annoyed, but antagonistic. Supposing he should tell his father the injunction that had been laid upon her, and that the Squire should insist upon its being withdrawn, what trouble might not her rashness entail upon Mrs. Melburn! what opportunities of persecution upon Mary! There was nothing that she would not have done to make atonement for her imprudence. But what could she do?

'You must please to remember, Major Melburn,' she said, pleadingly, 'that what I have just told you has been said in confidence.'

'I did not understand it in that sense,' he answered, coldly. 'Your communication, which is of much greater importance than you are aware of, Miss Dart, takes me by surprise.'

I really do not know in what direction my duty lies ; there are family interests involved in the matter, and it will be a question for my father to decide——’

‘ I entreat you as a personal favour,’ she interrupted earnestly, ‘ to say nothing of this to Mr. Melburn.’

‘ Jefferson, get the candles,’ exclaimed the Squire, irritably : ‘ the ladies are going upstairs.’

Mrs. Melburn, indeed, had risen with that intention, and was only waiting for Miss Dart’s attention to be disengaged ; her conversation with the Major had been so engrossing that this had escaped her notice ; no doubt they were all wondering what she could have to say to him of such apparent moment—a reflection in itself discomfiting, but which faded into insignificance beside the trouble that was hanging over her. If the Major should carry out his purpose of speaking to the Squire, it was only too probable that that very night would witness some catastrophe. There was not even time to renew her appeal

to his good feeling, or rather, as it seemed to her, to entreat his mercy.

It was therefore with an exquisite sense of relief that she heard these words whispered in a flash as he handed her her flat candlestick — ‘Leave your book here and come downstairs after it presently.’

As he held out his hand, she could not resist giving it a little squeeze of gratitude. He had not indeed promised to obey her request, but it was hardly to be imagined that, having thus offered her the opportunity of renewing it, he could ultimately decline it. Nothing so bad as that, thought the governess, recollecting her historical studies, had happened since Monmouth pleaded for his life with the second James.

So urgent was the occasion, and so important its claim, that not until the ladies had said good-night to her, and she found herself alone in her own apartment, was there room in her mind for other considerations. For the first time, she then reflected that to have made an appointment with her employer’s

son in the drawing-room, after the rest of the family had retired, was scarcely a proper thing for a young lady in her position to have done. As she stood at her half-opened door waiting for the voices in the hall, which would be the signal of the Squire's withdrawal to the smoking-room, she could not help calling to mind a saying of her aunt Richter when conversing with her about her future.

‘My dear, you will never make a governess; you are too impulsive, and have too proud a spirit of your own. Though diffident of your talents, you are not sufficiently impressed by the influences of wealth and rank; you have, in a word, too much of human nature about you.’

‘That is just why I cannot stand remaining at our “Ladies’ College,”’ she had answered, laughingly; ‘even with the possibility of becoming, at three-score years and ten or so, its Principal. Things are too cut-and-dried and conventional for me there; I want to breathe free air.’

‘That can’t be done by a governess in a genteel family, my dear ; or, at all events, by you,’ was the quiet reply. ‘You always said, when you were thought to be delicate, that a respirator seemed to suffocate you.’

And now she began to feel that Aunt Jane had been right ; and that she was not fitted for her calling. It was true, that as to her present trouble she was, to a great extent, the victim of circumstances ; though a little more prudence would have kept her out of it. But she could not conceal from herself that what she was about to do, however necessitated by her duty to others, was itself a rash proceeding, and one very open to misconception. Nevertheless, she had a strong sense of justice ; and since she had imperilled her pupil’s happiness by her own folly—for her opinion of Mr. Winthrop was by this time no higher than that which was obviously entertained by Mrs. Melburn of him, and if what she had called his persecution of Mary at Casterton should be permitted, there was no knowing how it would end—she admitted to

herself it was very right that she should be punished for it.

With a beating but resolute heart, she therefore heard the Squire depart, as usual, to that sanctuary where, under the influence of the kindly weed, men forget even their mortgages, and, candle in hand, ran softly down to the drawing-room to fetch her book.

The Major was waiting for her, and with a grave smile upon his face took her reluctant hand and held it in his own. She did not dare to anger him by withdrawing it, but met his eager eyes with a steadfast look which seemed (if such a thing were possible in one so self-possessed) to slightly disconcert him ; he had probably expected that she would have looked down.

‘And so, Miss Dart,’ were his first words, ‘you have taken the shilling?’

‘I do not understand you, Major Melburn.’

‘What, again?’ he answered, gently. ‘It seems that I am never to make myself intelligible to you. I mean, of course, that

you have enlisted—joined the camp of the enemy.’

‘What enemy?’

‘Come, come, I cannot believe, Miss Dart, that with your intelligence you have not discovered for yourself how matters stand in this house. Do you mean to tell me that you don’t see, for one thing, that my step-mother hates me like poison, and that Miss Mary shares her views? It is probable, indeed,’ he continued, cynically, ‘that they have been communicated to you by word of mouth already.’

‘Indeed, indeed, they have not,’ she answered, earnestly. ‘How could it have been so? It would have been as indecorous of your people to speak against you to me as it would have been painful to me to listen. It would have been ungrateful in me, too,’ she added, after a moment’s hesitation.

‘You are grateful for very small things, Miss Dart.’

‘Consideration and kindness to one in my position are not small things.’ She spoke

with genuine feeling ; but perhaps she would not have expressed herself so warmly but for the urgency of the occasion.

‘I am happy indeed,’ he said, ‘if I have been the means of making you feel more at home in this most uncomfortable house. There are circumstances into which there is no need to enter which, as I have hinted, make an engagement between Winthrop and my sister very desirable. They do not affect me, of course, but my father. When you told me to-night what were your sailing orders from Mrs. Melburn——’

‘They were sealed ones,’ she put in, promptly. ‘It was a dereliction of duty to reveal them. On the other hand, I thought I was safe with you—that is——’

‘Do not amend the phrase,’ he interrupted, earnestly. ‘You are always safe with me. For the moment, it struck me that it would be a dereliction of my duty not to inform my father of Mrs. Melburn’s plan to thwart his wishes ; but I find I am not so dutiful as I thought I was. There are other considera-

tions. For one thing, I would not be the cause of getting you into trouble for twenty Winthrops.'

'You are very kind,' murmured Miss Dart.

'There can be no hard-and-fast lines laid down for one's conduct in these matters,' he continued. 'Both you and I must be governed by circumstances; the attentions of this young gentleman, for example, it is obvious, must not be encouraged.'

'Pardon me, they must not be tolerated, Major Melburn,' interrupted the governess, firmly. 'Whatever influence I may possess, let me say, once for all, will be used to exclude them.'

'You have plenty of pluck, I must say,' exclaimed the Major, admiringly; 'but this is a very one-sided arrangement. My scruples, it seems, are to be ignored, while yours are to be respected. How very like a woman!'

'I have the weaknesses of my sex, no doubt,' she answered. 'I acknowledge that you have reason in what you say. Unhappily,

it is not in my power—as it lies in yours—to be generous in this particular case.’

‘My conduct, in short, like the second pig in the show, is “highly commended,” but not to be rewarded.’

‘I have, unfortunately, no reward to——’

‘Nay, but you have, indeed,’ interrupted the Major, eagerly. ‘May I tell you what it is?’

He was gazing fixedly into her eyes, but she did not dare withdraw them. It was somehow borne in upon her that it was necessary to meet his gaze with one as firm; and, though her heart beat fast, and her limbs trembled under her, she did so. To show the least alarm at what he was about to say, she felt, would be fraught with danger, though she scarce knew of what.

‘You have just told me,’ he said, with earnest gentleness, but with a rapid change of expression in his face which did not escape her, and which somehow suggested that he had at first intended to say something else, ‘that you cannot be generous to me; I do

not ask for generosity, but if I have really laid you under any obligation, as you seem to think, I ask you in return for justice. Will you do me justice? ’

‘Indeed I will, if you will tell me how? ’

‘The opportunity has not, as you have just reminded me, yet occurred ; but it will occur. You will hear me ill-spoken of, maligned, traduced ; my conduct to others, my conduct even to yourself, will be distorted and made to appear the very contrary of what it has been ; I shall be presented to you *en silhouette*, all black, and you will be required to recognise the portrait. Now, Heaven knows that I am no whiter than other men ; but I ask you to believe that I have my white points—that I am, at worst, like Farmer Jones’s horse we admired so to-day—piebald.’

‘I will think of you as piebald, and admire you as much as I can,’ said Miss Dart, smiling. It was not at all a laughing matter, as she well knew ; but there are occasions even of great moment when it is well to smile.

‘Above all things,’ he continued, without

noticing the lightness of her rejoinder, the cause of which indeed he probably well understood, 'I would ask you, when you are so good as to waste a thought on me, to use your own judgment and not that of other people; and when inclined to blame, make allowance for me as the judge did for the poor dogs we saw upon the downs to-day. Do this, and we shall be quits.'

'I will certainly do that,' said Miss Dart, earnestly.

'Good-night, good-night.' He pushed open the drawing-room door, which had not been closed during their interview, and held up his finger for silence.

It was a gesture she did not like, for it suggested something clandestine, yet she could hardly take notice of it. He remained in the hall, watching her as she went upstairs, and, as she turned the last corner, waved his hand and smiled. At the same moment she heard a door close in the neighbourhood of Mrs. Melburn's room. She felt the colour burn in her cheek as she hurried

to her own apartment. Innocent of harm, she was not indifferent to the imputation of it. There was certainly nothing wrong in her having gone downstairs to fetch her book ; though, unfortunately, she had forgotten to bring it back with her. But the expedition, she could not conceal from herself, had had its danger. It was curious, in one of her keen intelligence, that it did not strike her that Major Melburn was to blame for having necessitated such a step on her part ; but if some slight sense of grievance against him flashed for an instant through her mind, she forgot it and forgave him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE JOURNEY.

SOMEWHAT to Miss Dart's surprise, though she had begun to understand already the strength of will that dwelt in her hostess's frail body, Mrs. Melburn made her appearance next morning at the breakfast-table. If she did so, as was probable, with the same devoted courage which the hen exhibits when her chick is threatened with the foe, to defend her daughter from those attentions which, thanks to her maternal precaution, Mr. Winthrop would have no other opportunity of paying for months to come, her apprehensions were groundless ; for Mr. Winthrop was not present. He was never an early riser, and perhaps his head ached. A man may have all the good-will in the world

towards champagne, without that mis-called 'grateful' wine reciprocating his attachment : just as in that much-recommended process of hardening a delicate child you may happen to lose him, so in that of seasoning the brain to a favourite liquor you may fail in your object and come to considerable grief. The fact was, that through too much indulgence in liquor, Mr. Winthrop's nerves were not what they had been. The circumstance was much regretted 'in the county,' as in the case of a young gentleman of family and position, who had been pricked for High Sheriff, it was only proper that it should be. It was all the more necessary, as Mr. Melburn gravely argued, that he should be taken by the hand while there was yet time and room for amendment, and exposed to good influences ; and what better method could be desired of keeping such a nature straight than that of a suitable and well-chosen marriage? The Squire had so often expressed this view, and in such appropriate and even eloquent terms, that, in encouraging his young friend's attentions to

his daughter, he believed himself to be less aggrandising his family than performing a public duty. What his son, the Major, thought of it—who had had better opportunities than his parent of observing Mr. Winthrop's character—he was not called upon to say ; and, as was usual with him under such circumstances, he maintained a judicious silence.

Soon after breakfast, at which the mistress of the house scarce uttered a word, the travelling-carriage came round to the door which was to convey the young ladies by road to Casterton. Miss Dart had been summoned to Mrs. Melburn's room for a word of farewell, and it was literally a word. She had found Mary utterly overcome with grief—as indeed was natural, after such a parting as must have taken place—and her mother, white as a lily trembling on its stalk, but tearless.

‘Remember,’ she said, with touching pathos, ‘my only child is in your hands.’

Then with a sudden impulse she drew the governess towards her and kissed her fore-

head. Though affected by this painful scene, and deeply penetrated with the sense of responsibility thus imposed upon her, Miss Dart did not feel herself so drawn towards her employer as might have been expected. This personal demonstration had nothing caressing in it ; it was more like the sealing of the contract than an impulse of the emotions ; and in the pained and anxious face of the invalid there was less of faith than hope. With some murmured but earnest words expressive of her acceptance of the trust that had been placed in her, the governess took her leave. In the hall stood the Squire, with troubled and abstracted looks. ‘I hope you will have a pleasant drive, Miss Dart, and—um—enjoy yourself.’

. She passed on, that he might have his good-bye in private with Mary, who was following her. At the door stood the Major, with an extended hand, but maintaining a somewhat embarrassing silence. ‘We leave you in the sunshine,’ she said, with reference to the morning, which was bright with all the promise of spring.

‘It goes when you go,’ he answered in his gentlest tone. ‘I hope that the will which shuts out Winthrop from Casterton has not had a codicil added since yesterday that excludes me also.’

‘How could it possibly be so?’ she answered, with amazement.

He shrugged his shoulders. ‘At all events, I am grateful that it is not. Well, Exile is better than Death ; it is not “Good-bye,” but only “Au revoir.”’

There was a strange mixture, or so it seemed to the ear which it addressed, of jest and earnest in his voice.

He assisted Miss Dart into the carriage, and, as Mary came quickly out into the porch, stood beside the step and performed the like office for his sister. But without so much as touching his hand or casting a glance in his direction, she sprang into the vehicle, and in a broken tone bade the coachman drive on. Her veil was drawn down in such a manner that her face was invisible, but it was easy to be seen that she was deeply moved. Her companion pitied her from the bottom of her

heart, but she also thought that somewhat hard measure had been dealt to the Major, to whom, at all events, none of his sister's woes were owing. That stranger within our gates, the governess, regards matters that go on amongst us from an independent and unprejudiced point of view. However unenviable may be her lot in other respects, she remains comparatively unaffected by the convulsions which shake the pillars of domestic peace.

Miss Elizabeth Dart, for example, sympathetic and tender-hearted though she was, could not be expected to feel that departure from Burrow Hall as her companion did, who was parting from her mother under such sad circumstances. This was a distinct advantage to Mary, since she was not encouraged to dwell upon her own morbid thoughts. It was, indeed, a lesson to her not without its effect, to note the cheerfulness and vitality of her young friend who, dowered with so few of Fortune's gifts, seemed to find enjoyment or interest in everything about her. The fresh

air, the sunshine, the very motion of the carriage over the springy turf, gave her a keen sense of pleasure ; the desolate widespreading downs, with here and there a fir-clump, or a pond for the sheep to drink at, had a charm for her far beyond that of novelty. If her happiness had any other source, it was hidden even from herself. She experienced, not indeed 'the wild joys of living,' but the exquisite appreciation of mere existence, as she had never done before—not the unconscious delight of a healthy child, but the intelligent gratification of a lover of Nature.

'You have not lived much out of doors, I suppose ?' said Mary, smiling at one of these simple bird-notes of admiration.

'Oh, no ; at least, never in a wild free country like this.'

'But you would not like to live in it—in that farmhouse, for instance, in the bottom yonder ; five miles from everywhere and with not a book in the house, I'll answer for it, newer than "Pilgrim's Progress" ?'

'Oh, no, no, no !' she answered, vehe-

mently. 'I like the society of my fellow-creatures, even when I do not like the people themselves. I was not unhappy even at Miss Maigre's.'

'Who was Miss Maigre?'

'She kept the school where I was pupil-teacher before I went to the college. It was a very genteel establishment, with such rules and regulations as never were heard of. "Not to speak more than is absolutely necessary to a servant" was one of them. What a humane provision, what a charming device for promoting Christian sentiments, was it not?'

'I suppose it was to prevent the young ladies gossiping.'

'Not at all; it was to keep them select. "Not to kiss the governesses" was another regulation. The girls were never to forget that they were porcelain and other people mere earthenware.'

'That would have made me very angry, if I had been a governess,' said Mary. 'I can hardly believe it possible. Let us hope it was to discourage the habit of kissing.'

‘No. Miss Maigre ignored the very idea of that as an offence. There was, indeed, no punishment for it, just as there was no penalty for parricide in the laws of Solon. The only thing in the regulations which so much as hinted at it was the very last one, which closed the whole code Maigre, as it were, with a snap. “Not even to look at a boys’ school.”’

‘How that would delight Dr. Dalling!’ remarked Mary, laughing. ‘What he complains of in us women, in whose cause, to do him justice, he is otherwise always ready to do battle, is that we have no humour; if we had, he maintains that life would be much easier for us.’

‘I think Dr. Dalling is right; at least, though I don’t know whether I have the gift of humour or not, I have often had the rough places made smooth for me by recognising their ridiculous side. Indeed,’ she added, gravely, ‘one is sometimes tempted to think that Fate itself is a humorist.’

‘One hears of the irony of Fate,’ observed Mary.

‘I don’t mean exactly that,’ said Miss Dart, gently. ‘The idea I wished to convey is, after all, perhaps a painful one. There is doubtless a certain austerity about the ways of Providence, let Renan say what he will.’

‘Renan? Do you read Renan?’ inquired Mary, with a look of surprise.

‘I don’t read him, but I have read him.’

‘He is Jefferson’s favourite author.’

‘Indeed,’ returned Miss Dart, with indifference, or with what she flattered herself had the appearance of indifference. There had been something in the other’s tone, or perhaps it was only the unexpected mention of the Major’s name, which brought the colour to her cheeks. ‘It is a strange taste for a soldier. You would say the same, perhaps, of a governess,’ she continued, after a pause. ‘I do not feel called upon to defend Renan or even myself; but I have read many things which you will have no need to read. The library, which is to such as you a mere pleasure-ground, is to me the armoury from which I reach down the bow and spear by aid of which

I live. Without much reading, and that of all kinds, how, with my limited horizon, could I become acquainted with human life? Moreover, books are not only my teachers but my friends. You have never known—I hope you will never know—that sense of isolation which compels one to seek companionship in print and paper because that of flesh and blood is denied us.’

The governess spoke with a deep pathos, that touched the other.

‘Your lot has been a hard one; forgive me for recalling it to your recollection.’

‘It occurs to me now and then without reminder,’ was the bitter reply. Then, in gentler tones, she added, ‘I have nothing to forgive you for, my dear Miss Melburn.’

‘If you would have me believe you, please to call me Mary.’

‘You are very kind; I must be no longer Miss Dart to you, then; my name, Elizabeth, is a somewhat uncouth one, but the person who loves me always calls me Lizzie.’

‘The person?’

‘Yes ; my Aunt Jane. She thinks a great deal of me, I do assure you ; and does her best in the way of devotion to make up for the absence of those troops of friends who form the bodyguard of the more prosperous.’

There was a long silence. Was Miss Melburn meditating, thought the governess, on her companion’s unfortunate condition, of which it pained her to speak further ; or having, in a moment of impulse, made advances of friendship, did she regret them or, at all events, consider that she had done enough to encourage confidence ?

Such a reflection was caused neither by egotism nor self-consciousness ; it was Miss Dart’s way to thread the labyrinth of the mind of others, and track a motive through the maze. A harmless vivisectionist, she was attracted by these studies of the beating heart, which, if as yet they had profited her nothing, had certainly added interest to a life devoid of ordinary excitements.

They had now arrived at the summit of a great plateau which, however, still stretched

before them, obscuring what was beyond. Fifty yards away from the green track they were pursuing was a little eminence, devoid of its usual fir-crown, and Mary proposed that while the horses rested for a few minutes they should visit it.

‘We are still some distance from our journey’s end, Lizzie, but from Downing’s Nob yonder you will see your future home.’

‘And what is Downing’s Nob?’ inquired Miss Dart, as they moved swiftly over the elastic turf to the spot in question—a bare green mound with excavations on it which time had almost healed.

‘It is a barrow it is supposed, but if it has anything to do with Farmer Downing, which—not being a wheelbarrow—is improbable, it must be connected with some ancestor exceedingly remote. Some say it is Dane’s Nob; but though they have dug it half away no one has discovered whose nob it is.’

‘What did they find in it? How I should like to have been at the exploration!’ exclaimed Miss Dart, enthusiastically.

‘ You would like to be everywhere and at everything, I do believe,’ exclaimed Mary, laughing. ‘ They only found some bones and what the archæologists call implements, which it is very difficult for unlearned persons to identify with anything particular. Now, here’s a view for you!’

‘ The sea!’ cried Miss Dart, in a transport.

‘ Well, of course it is.’

‘ I have not seen the sea for years,’ answered the other, in hushed tones. ‘ How grand it is!’

She stood drinking in the scene before her with measureless content. It was really a remarkable spectacle. The downs came to an end abruptly, and looked down like a terrace on a garden, on an immense tract of low, flat land, which seemed to grow higher as it arrived at its boundary—the ocean. This tract had no fences of any kind, but was intersected with rivulets ; there were a few farms on it, but not so many farms as old square-towered churches.

‘That is Casterton Marsh,’ explained Mary. ‘The Romans banked out the sea from it, to the great surprise of the Britons, who thought it labour lost. If it were not for the dyke, the whole district would be under water.’

‘But the people?—there seems to be no population.’

‘It is very thinly peopled ; the air, as its neighbours say (who do not live there), is bad in winter, worse in summer, and only fit for cattle, which feed on the marsh in great numbers.’

‘But the cattle don’t go to church. Why are there so many churches?’

‘That has puzzled wiser heads than ours—I beg your pardon, I mean mine,’ said Mary, smiling. ‘After the Romans left, the dykes were kept up by the Archbishops of Canterbury ; and their Graces, it is supposed, caused churches to be built in excess of the population. They are all very old, and some of them, I am sorry to say, falling into decay. The same thing is to be seen on Romney Marsh.’

‘That was the Smugglers’ Colony, and where the conspirators landed who were to assassinate William III., was it not?’ observed the governess, with great interest.

‘I dare say it was ; I wish I knew as much as you do about things,’ said Mary, simply. ‘Well, at Rye and Winchelsea the sea has retreated, leaving them, as it were, stranded ; but at Casterton it has not quite deserted us. We are still a port, though it must be confessed but little patronised ; we are contemptuously spoken of as getting shallower and shallower every day.’

‘Never mind,’ said Miss Dart, roguishly ; ‘that often happens even inland.’

‘We *don’t* mind, Miss. We are very well satisfied with ourselves, I do assure you. And are we not picturesque? Observe, that while that great sweep of down constitutes for the most part only a terrace standing on a marsh, the portion of it above Casterton is still a cliff, as the rest of it once was. And look at our grey little town yonder, with its dear tumble-down old castle, its ancient church, built on a

rock, as it should be, and its magnificent hill.'

'It is magnificent, indeed ; but it is surely not an ordinary hill. It looks to me something artificial—like this very nob, for instance, only twenty times bigger.'

Mary clapped her hands together and uttered a little shout of gratification.

'What? Does it really strike you so, even at this distance? How delighted Roger Leyden will be when he comes to hear about it ; that is the great test of intelligence with him—whether people think Battle Hill was raised by human hands or not. It must have taken a good many hands, and I am afraid you will find yourself in but a small minority upon the subject. A new recruit will, however, be only hailed with the more rapture.'

'Battle Hill, you call it?' said Miss Dart, thoughtfully. 'There was an attraction for her in the object in question for which she could not account ; it almost seemed to her that she had seen it before ; though, if it was so, it could only have been in dreams.'

‘ Was there, then, a battle fought there? ’

‘ It is said so ; others, again, maintain it to be Beacon Hill. Mr. Jones, our Rector, insists upon it that it was called Bacon Hill, because of its having at one time produced beach nuts, which the swine fed upon. Roger Leyden and he are hardly upon speaking terms in consequence.’

They rejoined the carriage, which pursued a level track for miles, with only a low expanse of down on either hand ; but Battle Hill was persistently before the mental eyes of the governess.

Even when at last they reached the devious road which led down to the plain, and Casterton in all its old-world glories lay before them, the aspect of that curious hill still monopolised her attention. She could not account for the interest it had excited in her in any way. The case was similar to that not uncommon one where a girl sees a man’s face for the first time, and something whispers to her ‘ That is your fate ’ ; only this was a hill and not a person. ‘ Perhaps I shall be nur-

dered there and buried there,' she said to herself ; for, amongst her many thoughts, Miss Dart had grim ones ; ' and therefore fated to haunt the place for a few hundred years or so. Then, but not till then, I may get a little tired of Battle Hill.'

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE LOOK-OUT.

THE carriage descended the long decline, every turn of which brought into view some new and picturesque feature of the little town—the ruined castle, the high-towered church (once a sanctuary, Mary told her companion, for any one who had committed crime and fled there), the grey gabled houses, the short but massive jetty, with its red-sailed ships: but Battle Hill, topped with fir-trees, all leaning inland, like a gigantic helmet with wind-swept feathers, stood up black against the sun, and dominated all.

Presently they passed over a causeway, with the water lapping both its sides, and even the road itself; for it was high tide, and a fresh breeze was blowing.

‘How delicious is the smell of the sea!’ murmured Miss Dart in an ecstasy.

‘So say I,’ said Mary. ‘Dr. Dalling declares it comes from all sorts of dreadful things : but so do the best scents sold in Bond-street. For my part, when I go to a seaside place that has not got it, I feel the same lack and sense of disappointment as when I take up a dog-violet, which has no smell. Now, is not Casterton a charming old place, Lizzie?’

‘It is a poem. It must be a privilege to live in it.’

‘How glad Mat will be when I tell him that. I am sure mamma need not have been afraid you would find it dull.’

‘I don’t think Mrs. Melburn quite understands me,’ said Miss Dart, quietly. It was the first protest she had made against what she felt had been an injustice. Mary flushed but answered nothing. Her pained, embarrassed look, and her silence, afforded ample corroboration of the other’s suspicions.

‘I hope *you* will understand me, Mary,’

she went on, gravely. 'I am not afraid of being understood.'

'I am quite sure of that,' returned Mary, earnestly. 'If I do not understand you just at first, you must not mind that, since, in the meantime, I have learnt to like you, Lizzie.'

The tears rushed to Miss Dart's eyes.

'How good you are to me!' she said.

There was no embrace between them, as would have happened in the case of most girls, under similar circumstances. Perhaps Mary had been induced to say a little more than she had intended. At all events, she seemed to think that she had said enough.

'Now we are going to have a little shaking,' she remarked, as the carriage rumbled over the little round stones with which Casterton street (for it had but one) was paved. The grass grew between these stones; there was no traffic; nor, indeed, did they meet with any vehicle until the horses stopped at Mrs. Meyrick's door. The house was of modest size and ancient date. Above the door, and even on the woodwork of the lower windows,

were carved fruit and flowers ; the low roof projected a foot or two, and threw its shadow on the pavement. Miss Dart had seen such a house in drawing-books (MS.), at Miss Maigre's, but never before in reality.

‘ It must be very old, is it not ? ’ she inquired as they waited for the summons of the bell to be answered.

‘ “ Old ” is a comparative term in Caster-ton. It is two hundred years old, perhaps—what Roger Leyden calls “ a mushroom house.” ’

The door opened, and, instead of letting light into the house, seemed to emit it into the dark and narrow street. At the end of the passage, and immediately fronting them, was a large window, through which the sun streamed ; the countless smiles of the sunlit sea could be seen through it. A statuette and two busts of marble added their white brightness. Though small, the house was not in the least like the cottage home which Miss Dart had been led to expect from Mrs. Melburn's description of it, and still less from

its own appearance from without. The front of it was in harmony with its neighbour dwellings: the windows were full of little lozenge-shaped panes, and opened on hinges; a picturesque gloom pervaded it. At the back all was modern, the windows in sashes of single panes admitted light into every cranny. A couple of centuries seemed to have elapsed between the front door, and that which opened on the garden in the rear. In the drawing-room into which the two girls were ushered by the neat little serving-maid, with whom Mary had shaken hands as with an old friend, and greeted with an 'How are you, Janet?' the furniture was comfortable even to luxury, but less quaint than even the fashion of the day approved. The oak panelling alone reminded one of any connection with the past. Here, too, on pedestals, on either side of the fireplace, were figures in marble.

'I had forgotten to tell you,' whispered Mary, noticing her companion's surprise at this excess of statuary, 'that Uncle Meyrick was a sculptor.'

Miss Dart nodded an 'Indeed'; she was too interested in things around her to give attention to any particular matter. The contrast the bright little room afforded to the grand drawing-room at Burrow Hall was very great, but especially in its outlook.

There was but a strip of pleasure-ground between the house and the sea, on which, however, it looked down from a considerable height; but on the right hand the garden broadened and afforded space for some erection formed of glass, which nevertheless did not look like a conservatory.

'My mistress has stepped out,' said the maid, 'not expecting you to arrive so early, but you will find Mr. Matthew in the pavilion.' With that she threw up the window, beneath which was a short flight of steps, as though the acceptance of her suggestion was a matter of course.

A bright expectant look came into Mary Melburn's eyes and a flush of pleasure into her cheeks; nevertheless, she hesitated.

'Perhaps, Lizzie, you would like me to

show you your room first, and to take off your wraps ?’

‘Not at all ; go and see your cousin by all means, I will wait here with the greatest of pleasure.’

‘Wait here ? Why should you wait ?’
The speaker’s cheek grew crimson.

‘It was only that I understood that Mr. Meyrick was an invalid, and perhaps the presence of a stranger——’

‘Hush, hush,’ interrupted Mary, earnestly ;
‘he does not like to be considered an invalid, nor indeed is he one in the sense that you imagine. Though he gets no better, he grows no worse, and perhaps in time——’

Here she suddenly broke off and turned her face to the sea. Whatever were her thoughts, it is certain they were deep and tender. It is to the ocean when we are upon its shore that we naturally turn our eyes in thought ; even the boundless blue of the skies, though it speaks a similar language to the soul, affords less encouragement to reflection : the eternity of which it is the symbol does not appeal to

us so personally, its depths are out of our sphere.

‘Hullo ! Why, Mary !——’

The words, which were musical and full of surprise and joy, came from the pavilion, at the door of which stood a young man, shading his eyes from the sun with his right hand, and with the other grasping the door-post.

‘We are coming, Mat, we are coming !’ cried Mary, as if apprehensive that he would make some effort to meet them, and at the same time moving rapidly towards him. Miss Dart followed at a slower pace. To her eyes the young man presented the appearance of some spiritual picture set in a humble frame—the doorway. He was tall and slight, and, save for that supporting hand, his figure and attitude suggested no infirmity. His face, which was extremely beautiful, was not deficient in colour, or perhaps the occasion supplied it ; but the features were delicate as those of a woman, and the curved lips, though smiling, were pressed together mechanically, as is the case with those who suffer from

habitual pain. His complexion was very dark, and his hair of that glossy blackness which is more often seen in natives of Spain and Italy than in those of our own even sunniest south. His eyes were large and liquid, and full of expression.

‘Why, you are even better than your word, Mary,’ he exclaimed, as he took his cousin’s hand and welcomed her with effusion. ‘You come to-day instead of to-morrow, and earlier to-day than we could have hoped for.’

‘Mamma thought it more convenient,’ stammered Mary, ‘since she was leaving home. This is my friend, Miss Dart.’

‘We are very pleased to see you, Miss Dart. My mother ought to be here to bid you welcome. But pray step into my little den.’

He motioned that she should precede him, and was about to make his way, after the fashion of lame folks, by help of table and chair to a couch with pillows, that stood in one corner of the apartment, when Mary interposed her arm. ‘Here is your crutch, Mat ; you are surely not grown too proud to use it ?’

His dark sensitive face took the hue of the pomegranate ; it evidently pained him to exhibit his dependence before a stranger.

‘ You must consider Lizzie, here, once for all, as one of the family,’ said Mary, gently, translating his look. It was a touching sight to see her lead him to his place—the should-be weak assisting the should-be strong ; both so young, but one so young in vain, since health and strength were denied him. If Miss Dart had not already suspected the love they bore one another it would have been impossible to doubt it as she looked at them. It was a spectacle not easily forgotten. The scene itself, too, was striking enough to impress a much less vivid imagination than that with which she was gifted.

The pavilion, as it was called, was a large room, built entirely of glass, but with a fireplace and shutters and curtains, so as to be available for winter use. It commanded a noble prospect, the sea, the harbour, and the most picturesque part of the old town, including the ruined castle. Whatever less agreeable

objects presented themselves were shut out from the view by painted windows, which threw their light so lavishly upon the floor that the India matting with which it was covered resembled a gorgeous carpet. What most attracted Miss Dart's attention, however, were the books, which always act as a magnet to the eye that loves them, in the palace or the hut, in camp or cabin, however strange be the surroundings ; it is on them that it naturally settles, as the bee on the flower. There was no great choice of volumes in the pavilion ; but what were there Miss Dart recognised at once as her favourite reading—the poets. They were neither in shelves nor slides, but were strewn about in profusion—on tables and chairs, and floor, and on the writing-desk drawn up to the sofa on which, as if exhausted with his recent exertion, the young man lay at length. It might well have seemed to Elizabeth Dart that to live in that fairy bower, with its environments, even under such conditions as were imposed on its proprietor, would have been preferable to her own

position, with its common gifts of health and vigour. Was it a hopeless yearning in Matthew Meyrick's face, or a yearning all but equally hopeless in her own secret heart, that forbade the exchange? The idea did but cross her mind and was dismissed.

‘Roger has not been here to-day, Mat,’ observed Mary, presently.

‘What tells you that?’

‘Something that does not speak to the ear. I don't smell his tobacco smoke.’

‘But it so happens I have been smoking myself.’

‘I know that, too,’ she answered, smiling. Whereupon they smiled at one another with tender significance. There are some poor creatures, mere dabblers in the art of love, who would have turned this into ridicule; but Miss Dart understood it thoroughly. If the step of the man one loves, or his voice, is discernible from that of another, why should not his tobacco-smoke be equally recognisable?

The two young people were very far from excluding Miss Dart from their conversation.

Her young host, indeed, was most pleasant and genial ; nevertheless, she felt that they had matters to talk about that had to be postponed till they were alone together. It was, therefore, rather a relief to her when Mary suddenly exclaimed, ‘There is Aunt Louisa.’

The mistress of the house was a lady of formidable proportions, and as she stood on the top of the steps that led down from the parlour, they afforded a pedestal for their full display. It almost seemed that a new statue of life-size, and a little over, had been added to the already numerous Meyrick collection. Though so stately of form, the expression of her face was gentle even to shyness. She was handsome as her brother, the Squire, and very like him ; but it was a likeness of mere kinship, which (like its loving) is often of a mere mechanical kind. They had the same strongly marked features, the same aristocratic air, the same coloured eyes, even ; but her voice and manner were her own. Where he was patronising, she was kindly ; but there was

something in her hesitating air which suggested weakness.

Her welcome, like her son's, was cordial ; but the manner was less natural. It seemed that while performing the duties of hospitality, which she did with true womanly grace, her mind was occupied with other and less agreeable matters.

At luncheon, which, though served with elegance, was of the simplest kind, Miss Dart noticed that wine-glasses were set before herself and Mary only, till a look from her mistress caused the maid to place one before Mr. Matthew. Mary declined the claret that was offered her.

‘I do think,’ said her aunt, ‘that after your journey over the downs you ought to take some wine. Your mother has placed you in my hands, remember.’

‘Very well,’ said Mary, smiling, ‘I am all obedience. I will have half a glass.’

‘What do you think of that as a young lady's notion of being “all obedience,” Miss Dart?’ inquired Mrs. Meyrick. ‘I trust

you are not going to follow a bad example. The wine won't hurt you ; you need not be afraid of its being a "vin du pays"—a Casterton vintage. It comes from my brother's cellar.'

'Indeed, I am not afraid of any such thing,' laughed the governess ; 'but I never do take wine in the middle of the day.'

'That is severe on *me*,' observed Mary. 'It would only serve you right if I said, "But she makes up for it at dinner, though."'

'Mat, I do hope you will have some,' said Mrs. Meyrick, pleadingly.

'You know, mother, that I never take wine,' was the quiet rejoinder.

'But the doctor says it's so good for you—I mean this kind of wine. Mary, speak to him.'

'I am going to drink your health, Mat,' said Mary, 'and I hope you will drink mine. I am sure you will not pay me the bad compliment of doing so in water.'

The young man signed to the servant to fill him a full glass. As the cousins pledged

one another, it seemed to Miss Dart that Matthew's eyes involuntarily wandered towards his crutches, which stood in a little rack, made on purpose for them, within reach of his hands. His face, which had flushed as Mary spoke, grew pale at Mary's words.

When the two girls presently found themselves alone together, Mary spoke of this.

'You doubtless observed Mat's behaviour about the wine at luncheon, Lizzie?'

'I noticed that it seemed to pain him to have his health drunk, poor fellow.'

'I didn't mean that,' said Mary, with a quick flush. 'I was foolish to do it, because he is always so hopeless about himself. I was only referring to the wine. You must know, if you have not guessed it, that Mat and his mother are very ill off.'

'I am very sorry indeed; I had not guessed it. I should have thought, judging from this pretty house——'

'That was poor uncle Theo's doing,' she interrupted. 'He was a man devoted to his art, and who loved comfort and luxury. I

am afraid he spent all his money, and some of poor Aunt Louisa's, in that way. She loves the place for his sake, and will never be induced to give it up. There have been all kinds of trouble and worry about it. My father quarrelled with my uncle when he was alive—I believe there were faults on both sides : Uncle Theo was very thoughtless and aggravating; and papa had no sort of sympathy with his ways. My aunt, of course, could not endure to hear her husband spoken ill of; and Mat—who would blame him for it?—espoused his mother's cause. The thing has been patched up, but there remains a soreness. When I visit the Look-out, my expenses are always paid, as indeed it is only right they should be, and wine and things are sent with me. Mat never takes wine, not because he doesn't like it, or because it is not good for him—as you heard my aunt say, it is very good for him—but simply because it is too dear a luxury. And he is too proud to drink papa's wine.'

'I understand,' said Miss Dart, softly ;

nevertheless, this news was a revelation to her. She had been used to poverty all her life; but here was a kind of poverty with which she had been hitherto unacquainted.

‘What makes it so dreadful,’ continued Mary, ‘is that dear Mat feels himself so helpless, and such a burden on his mother; and what I fear is, that there are even worse things behind the ills we know of, and that, with all her economy, poor Aunt Louisa is still living beyond her little income. Only remember that you need never feel uncomfortable about our expenses, because, as I have said, they are defrayed. If you had guessed the real facts of the case without knowing this, I believe you would have starved yourself, Lizzie; at all events, it would have made you very uncomfortable.’

‘It is very good of you to place such confidence in me, Mary.’

‘Perhaps I should not have done so if you were less clever,’ said Mary, smiling. ‘I was afraid of your finding it all out for yourself except about our being paid for.’

Under other circumstances, Miss Dart, perhaps, would have reflected that this was not the first time that confidence had been reposed in her, as it were, on compulsion ; but sorrow for the position of Mrs. Meyrick and her son monopolised her mind. She knew the sting of poverty well ; but then she had strength and health to bear it, and she had not been brought up in luxury as her hostess had been. With the habit of one used to small economies her thoughts turned to the future. ‘ But, my dear Mary, if your aunt is now living beyond her means, and your cousin can earn nothing for himself, matters must get worse and worse.’

‘ Yes ; but what my aunt says to herself is, that they will last his time, and for her own she cares nothing. If only during the short space that Fate has allotted to him he can be made happy and comfortable, she will afterwards be content to live on a crumb.’

‘ And he does not know this ?’

‘ Of course not, it would kill him if he did. He only knows that she has a small

income, and even that knowledge makes him chafe and pine because he has no power to assist her. "What can a cripple with his crutches do for anybody?" he says to himself.'

'Does he get worse?' inquired Miss Dart, gently.

'I cannot say; sometimes I think he does, and then, again, sometimes he seems better. The doctor here pronounces his case hopeless, but Mat has had no really good advice, nor will he consent to take it. Like all chronic invalids, the dear fellow is a little obstinate. "I am a cripple for life," he says, "and no money shall be wasted in buying false hopes on my account."' '

CHAPTER XIV.

ROGER LEYDEN.

THE information which Miss Dart had received as regarded the state of affairs at the Look-out interested her far more than her informant had any idea of, though she counted on her sympathy. It is often said that there are none so kind to the poor as the poor themselves, and certainly there is no bond of union so quickly made as that of a common poverty. Its shifts, its needs, its humble aspirations are understood and sympathised with at once, even if there be no oppressor against whom to make common cause. The reason why ladies of moderate means have so much more to say to one another, and are so much more at ease when they meet for the first time than fashionable women, is that they have something to talk about besides 'gadding and

gossip.' Between the folks at Burrow Hall and Elizabeth Dart, a gulf had been fixed ; it was not only that the former neither toiled nor spun, but that they were acquainted with none of those anxieties which, while they make rough the road of life to us, undoubtedly add to its interest. It is by no means the least of the misfortunes of wealth that those who possess it are cut off from the hopes and fears that move the majority of their fellow-creatures ; and it is curious enough how even those who have 'made their money,' as the phrase goes, lose touch of these things and stand aloof, or at all events apart from them, so far as sympathy goes, equally with those who are born rich.

The position of the Meyricks not only excited Miss Dart's compassion, but attracted her imagination. It was no ordinary case, such as her own, for instance, of want of friends and means. She pictured to herself her hostess in her youth, as the 'daughter of the house,' a member of a county family, petted and indulged ; then, her marriage with the

sculptor, no doubt, contrary to the wishes of her friends, and in face of certain prophecies which, however commonplace and conventional, had found their fulfilment. She could well understand the friction that had taken place between the hard wood and the smooth—the Squire and the artist—during her whole married life, and the flame that had come of it when she was left a widow, much worse off than even the prejudices of her kinsfolk had all along prognosticated. Then the boy, the apple of his mother's eye, and such a goodly apple, but with the seeds of death in him—delicate, sensitive, resentful even of the benefits that the enemies of his father would confer upon him ; conscious of his mother's poverty, but ignorant of the extent of it ; the prey of hopeless love, too. These things, which on an ordinary mind would have dawned sooner or later, presented themselves to the governess with distinct completeness on the instant ; her pity, easily moved at the cry of distress, was much more poignant when there was no cry. She felt a vehement desire to help this

poor lady and her son which, somehow, was not quenched by the reflection that she had no power to help even herself. Among the miseries of small or no means is seldom reckoned the sense of our utter helplessness to help others in the like calamity ; it is, nevertheless, to some people at least, a considerable factor in the sum of wretchedness. That independence of character Miss Dart possessed, and which, however advantageous in some respects to one in her position, had its drawbacks in others, disappeared at once from her manner in relation to her new friends, and caused her to be welcomed from the first as one of themselves. No doubt they felt instinctively that this young woman, who might have taken either side in the family dissension, belonged to their faction.

There was one person, however, for whose approval, whether about things or persons, both mother and son were wont to wait before making up their minds. This was Roger Leyden, of the Castle. He was so called, and was proud of the designation, not be-

cause he kept an inn of that name, but because he lived in the old tower which was all that was left of that once formidable pile. There were no other Leydens in Casterton to necessitate his being so called by way of distinction, but he was always spoken of as 'of the Castle,' as though he had been some territorial magnate. He had been connected with the ruin so long, and was so much more conversant with its history (as indeed with that of the whole district) than any other living person, that one was always associated with the other. If any one came to Casterton in search of information as regarded the antiquities of the place, or its archæology, he was referred to Roger Leyden as naturally as, if his horse had wanted a shoe, he would have been directed to the blacksmith's. His family had been natives of the place for centuries; he plumed himself on having been born 'free' (*i.e.* on his father having been a freeman of Casterton). Notwithstanding this, his youth and early manhood had been spent elsewhere. Having been left an orphan, with very narrow means,

he had gone forth, in what capacity it was not generally known, to make his fortune ; but at all events he had found it, or as much of worldly wealth as sufficed his simple needs. He had returned in early manhood to his native town, and taken the old tower off the willing hands of the Corporation, in whom it was vested, as a place of residence. And now, after long years, he had become as well known as his dwelling ; with which, indeed, to the young folk of the place, he seemed coeval. Some called him eccentric, some a character ; but, on the whole, his fellow-townsmen were proud of him, as of one who could give his reasons for the faith that was in him as respected all that pertained to their dwelling-place. There was, however, a rough side to his tongue, as well as a want of sympathy with all commonplace notions, that prevented his being generally popular, save among the poor, on whom he spent much of his substance. The only house where he was a constant visitor, or with whose inmates he was on familiar terms, was the Look-out.

At his own request he had undertaken the superintendence of Matthew Meyrick's education. 'I have been a schoolmaster,' was his modest statement of his qualifications to the boy's mother, 'and though I have never succeeded in becoming a scholar, it is not through ignorance of what constitutes scholarship. If your lad were as other lads, I should be of little use to him. I could not teach him to push his way in the world, nor to get the better of his fellow-creatures. I cannot even promise to make him love learning for its own sake; but if you will entrust him to my care, he shall learn to hate idleness, and enjoy such pleasures, and they are the truest ones, as lie within his reach. Life will thus be rendered at least more tolerable to him. His companionship will to me be priceless, for you know how dear he is to me; the obligation is wholly on my side. I ask for this post of instructor as a personal favour, and I shall consider it as a sacred trust.'

It need hardly be said that the generous offer had been gratefully accepted by the

widow. Roger Leyden had proved himself already a true friend during her husband's lifetime. His advice had been taken when that of all others had been resented, and though he could not prevent Mr. Meyrick's extravagances he had sometimes restrained them. Above all, when Death had beckoned the sculptor from a world that had been little else to him but a land of dreams, Roger Leyden had been the champion of his memory; a chivalrous task enough, since the two men had had absolutely nothing in common save their affection for those whom one had left behind him. Theo Meyrick (as he always elected to be called, though it is probable that his Christian name had had at least another syllable at his baptism) was an artist essentially of the modern type, in the days before art had gone to mediæval sources for instruction. He was very much at his 'ease in Zion,' not only as respected the old masters, but everything else which time had hallowed; and of the Christian centuries unhesitatingly announced his preference for the nineteenth.

This of itself was wormwood to Roger Leyden. But when Theo Meyrick put his views into practice, and let light and air into the sacred precincts of the Mayor's House, which, moreover, he newly christened—an act of very adult baptism—the Look-out, Roger's loyalty to his friend was sorely tried indeed. It seemed to him that nothing less than a sacrilege had been committed. He had given certain ancient doors and windows, which would otherwise have been sold as rubbish, sanctuary in the Castle, where they remained a perpetual reminder of that act of Vandalism on the part of the sculptor.

Yet, as we have said, when Theo Meyrick died an unsuccessful artist who, moreover, had wasted his goods, and not only his own goods, Roger Leyden became his apologist and defender. The dead man had made him his executor, an appointment which, though little more than a sinecure, gave him a *locus standi* which not even the Squire could dispute or ignore; and he had stood between him and the widow more than once when

such intervention had been sorely needed. He had long ceased to be Matthew's tutor, but only to become his friend, and it was difficult to say whether mother or son esteemed him most. If Miss Elizabeth Dart, indeed, had been aware of his relations with her new friends, and how accustomed they were to regard matters through his spectacles, she might have looked forward to meeting him with no little apprehension, lest she should fail to make a pleasant impression on him, and thereby lose what little ground she might have won in their good opinion.

As regards personal appearance, however, as he presented himself to her eyes that afternoon at five-o'clock tea, he was far from formidable. A frail, slender old man, with a stoop of the shoulders, and long, scanty grey hair, he looked more like some illustration out of a German fairy story than an executor and family adviser; he had large silver-rimmed spectacles, which were always sliding down his nose, and being constantly replaced, with a reproving shake of the head, which set

them off again. His voice was shrill, and his manner abrupt to brusqueness, the result, as Mrs. Meyrick was careful to inform her guest, of constitutional shyness; and, by way of salute to the new arrivals, he nodded to Miss Dart with his hand behind him, and pinched Mary Melburn's ear.

'And how is dear mamma?' he inquired, tenderly (as though the Squire and his son were not in existence), and when he was reminded where she was about to go for her health, began to abuse the German waters.

'Why does she not go to Bath? King Bladud flourished before any of the Bads were heard of; but England is never good enough for some people, whether they be sick or sound.'

'If mamma had gone to Bath, Miss Dart and I would not have come to Casterton, Mr. Leyden,' said Mary, reproachfully.

'And then Miss Dart would not have been bored to death, as she probably will be,' was the unconciliating rejoinder. 'A miserable, dull, grass-grown place this: don't you think so, young lady?'

‘It is grass-grown, but to a Londoner like myself that has all the charm of novelty,’ said the governess, simply ; ‘while as to its being dull and miserable, I never beheld so beautiful a town, nor one half so interesting. Some one has called a cathedral a “petrified religion,” and similarly your little town seems to me to be a poem in stone and bricks.’

‘What do you think of that, Mat?’ cried the little man, his eyes twinkling with pleasure. ‘This young lady is evidently in your line of business.’

‘Nay, I think she is rather in your line, Mr. Leyden,’ said Mary, ‘from the admiration she expressed for Downing’s Nob as we came along, and from the way in which she recognised Battle Hill, when half a dozen miles from it, as being an artificial elevation.’

‘Viewed from the north, as she beheld it, it ought so to strike everybody,’ exclaimed the antiquary, with enthusiasm ; ‘nevertheless, it showed an intelligence only too rare, and especially as regards the feminine mind, that she recognised the fact. I shall do

myself the pleasure, if she will permit me, of going over Battle Hill with this young lady.'

'My poor Lizzie!' sighed Miss Melburn, with exaggerated compassion.

'Miss Dart, you are in for it,' cried Matthew, sympathetically.

The little man looked from one to the other, like a terrier between two antagonists, uncertain upon which to spring; at last he snapped at Matthew.

'There are worse things to be endured, Miss Dart, I do assure you, than being condemned to hear a lecture on antiquities from a competent authority. It is possible that you may, one day, find yourself under the necessity of listening to the lucubrations of an amateur poet. Even my grey hairs have been no protection from that outrage.'

'When I have gone through both experiences,' said Miss Dart, gravely——

'And provided you survive them,' put in Mary, slyly.

'I shall then be able to say from which I have derived the greatest pleasure.'

‘Now, I call that very pretty,’ observed Mrs. Meyrick.

‘Well, well, we will both be friends with her till she decides, Matthew,’ said the old fellow, smiling.

‘I intend to be friends with Miss Dart in any case,’ said Matthew, gallantly.

‘That’s rank bribery,’ exclaimed the old gentleman. ‘He is bidding for a favourable criticism upon his epic.’

‘I have never written an epic,’ protested the young man, blushing.

‘I have heard a recitation or two that gave me the impression of an epic; that is, as to length,’ persisted the old gentleman.

‘Don’t you mind him, my dear,’ said the widow, encouragingly.

‘Don’t you mind him, Mat,’ echoed Mary, with indignant sympathy.

‘Don’t you mind him, Mat,’ shrieked the old fellow, with satiric iteration. ‘If you never saw a spoilt boy, Miss Dart, let me introduce one to your attention.’

‘The question in such a case that natu-

rally occurs to me, with my educational instincts,' observed Miss Dart, demurely, is, 'Who was his tutor?'

This sally was greeted with general applause, only increased by the dumb dissent of the little antiquary. He shook his head at the sentiment, and his finger at Miss Dart, and enjoyed the whole situation more than any of them. Such is the marvellous power of genial mirth, that the governess made more way with him by that sly rejoinder, and more surely established her footing in the household generally, than she could have done by the most Machiavellian arts.

By the time dinner was over, for which Roger Leyden remained without invitation, and as naturally as though he were an inmate of the establishment, it seemed to Elizabeth Dart as though, instead of a visitor, she was a member of the family ; and that in the Look-out she had found a home. The most convincing proof of it and of her possessing her soul at ease, without those disturbing thoughts which the sense of strangeness and

insecurity always engenders, was that on retiring to her room that night she drew forth from her desk a certain manuscript, which had remained untouched during her whole stay at Burrow Hall, and proceeded to enter in it divers memoranda and reflections ; such terms are inadequate, yet it is difficult to give them a more appropriate name, for that manuscript was certainly no commonplace book. Like Madame Roland on the scaffold, Elizabeth Dart often wished for a pen to set down the strange thoughts which arose within her ; of late the opportunity had been denied her, or rather circumstances had forbidden it, but now they rolled in upon her brain as unceasingly as the moonlit waves broke in upon the shore in foam beneath her window, and with as clear and picturesque distinctness as the outlines of Battle Hill itself, which rose in majesty above the pavilion.

She as yet had no notion of what she was, still less of what she might grow to be, but now and then, 'in seasons of calm

weather' like the present, a sense of intellectual force, quite apart from self-consciousness, was wont to seize and intoxicate her like the inspiration of the sybil. When it left her she experienced a feeling of exhaustion, and also of disappointment; she almost felt that she had been the sport of some mocking spirit, but it recurred again and again, and each time with increased strength, filling her with a vague consciousness of power. She was no longer the governess and companion, the insignificant unit in the great sum of social life; her whole being seemed to expand, like the Jin in the Arabian Nights released from its bottle, and to spread itself in all directions. Her spirit had wings and flew upward, regarding from a height the world from which it had temporarily escaped, with keen observance and speculation. Her pen flew over the paper impelled by an inexplicable and almost irresistible impulse, and yet among all her crowding thoughts the central one, dwelling in a secret but far from serene seclusion, remained unexpressed. Its form

was as yet too vague ; in the rational and ordinary moods of her well-balanced mind, before whose gate paced the sentinel Common-sense, it never intruded ; but sometimes he deserted his post, and the Fancy roved. She did not know it for what it was, or at all events did not know it for certain, much less did she recognise that other and much rarer attribute which possessed her : but the one was Love and the other was Genius.

CHAPTER XV.

ON BATTLE HILL.

IF Elizabeth Dart was a genius—a matter which, though I have decided in her favour, truth to say, there were some to dispute—(a misfortune, however, which also happened to Shakspeare), she had none of those indolent, happy-go-lucky, take-me-in-the-humour ways which in the public mind is somehow associated with that divine gift. To some people it is almost shocking to learn that Scott was a diligent and hard worker, that Wordsworth was a man of business who practised economies; and I fear that it will arouse incredulity as to the young lady's pretensions when I confess that she was an early riser. Notwithstanding her fatigues of the previous day, and the penwork which, as has been hinted,

followed it, Miss Dart rose next morning, if not with the lark, with Janet the little maid, who was going about her work with a song as blithe and on almost as light a wing. But if harmony was dear to Janet, the opportunity of conversation was still more sweet. The cook and she, as she was careful to inform the visitor, made up the household in ordinary at the Look-out, though on great and rare occasions (such as the Squire's coming) the services of a charwoman were enlisted. The cook had been there ever since the mistress kept house, and was her own maternal aunt. Sometimes the springs rose at Casterton and filled the cellar, so that you would think the sea was coming in. At Whitsuntide and Michaelmas there were hiring fairs, when the place was like London Town. Mr. Matthew had been like what he was ever since she (Janet) could recollect. Was it not a pity? It was always such a pleasure to him, and indeed to all of them, to have Miss Mary there. It put new life into them—for Mr. Leyden, though he was very kind, mostly spoke of

them as was dead and gone—and raised Missus's spirits. All this information was given gratuitously, and with great volubility. It was evident that listeners were not often to be met with in Casterton, and that even such a chance as the unlocking of the front door for one of them was not to be neglected. There was nothing of fitfulness or gossip in the maiden's discourse : it flowed like a pent-up stream, to which an outlet has been miraculously afforded.

‘Which is the nearest way to Battle Hill?’ inquired the involuntary recipient of all this information, in a moment, not of silence, but of recuperation.

‘I don't know, Miss,’ answered Janet, simply.

‘Good gracious! Why, the hill just outside the town. I see it from my window rising behind the pavilion.’

‘Well, I don't stir much abroad, Miss; but I suppose it will be what they call the “Loomp.” You turn to the left and then to the right by the grocer's shop.’

It was as though a denizen of Fish Street, on being requested to direct one to the Monument, had answered, 'I am not a gad-about myself, but perhaps you mean what our folks call the "Spike."'

It was, as we have said, Miss Dart's habit to rise early, but with such a new and interesting world awaiting her as Casterton promised to prove she could hardly have done otherwise. The poet of Nature has assured us that even in old age the sunrise still seemed to him 'a glorious birth'; and to some of us who are old and not poets, the everyday miracles of earth, sky, and sea have yet their attractions, but a new place that is a town or city, which we happen never to have seen before—the mere work of men's hands—awakens in us little expectation. It is only one more ant-hill on the way to the grave. But with the young it is different. Such matters have for them the charm of novelty and almost of discovery, it is only the dullards who take them as a matter of course. The narrow streets of this forlorn old town with

its pent-house roofs and gables, its massive walls still stubbornly resisting the attacks of time, its ancient gateway with its toothless portcullis menacing the unconscious passer-by, were delightful to the eye of their latest visitor. The silence of the place, unbroken, save by the chatter of the jackdaws about the grey church-steeple, and the distant lap of the sea, filled her with an inexpressible calm. To most minds under similar circumstances such a scene would have been merely an enlargement of the experience, and would have afforded an excuse for the purchase of local photographs, or a topic for dinner-table conversation. With Elizabeth Dart it went far deeper. She pictured to herself the countless generations of her own race who had inhabited these old-world houses and trodden this historic ground. She speculated upon the lives of those who still dwelt there, so peaceful, so secluded, so out of the region in which her own lot had been cast. The traveller sees fifty such places and has something to say of each—the date of its foundation, the propor-

tions of its church, including the height of its tower, and the genealogy of the Lords of the Manor. This one was sufficient for her, and she learnt more from it than he, though she had not the advantage of his information. No matter how exceptional may be the circumstances of his position the traveller never forgets himself, and expects his reader to be interested in how he slept and what he had for breakfast; as Elizabeth Dart trod the grass-grown streets of this slumbrous town she was unconscious of her own existence, which was merged and lost in that of a hundred generations.

The hill of which she was in quest stood farther off than she had anticipated, though scarcely at such a distance as was indicated by the term 'abroad' which Janet had used. Though it had seemed to tower above her very window, it was, in fact, more than half a mile away. It was visible enough so soon as she had cleared the town, which was fortunate, as not a human being did she meet of whom to ask the way.

This solitude intensified the solemnity of the scene. It might have been some morning after the Danes had landed, as they often had done on that coast, and slain every mother's son in the little town.

From this hill how many times must those thrice-accursed sails have been descried and the note of alarm have been sounded. The Loomp, or Lump, as Janet had called it, was certainly of peculiar formation ; it resembled in shape a quartern loaf, as though the upper part had been superimposed upon the lower ; but while that homely metaphor at once intruded upon the spectator's mind, it was without prejudice to the picturesqueness of the object in question. From base to summit it was well covered with turf, but of two different kinds—that of the lower half being the short close turf of the downs, that of the upper of a longer and softer kind, plentifully mingled with moss. It was bare of trees except for those few firs upon its apex, which the sea-winds, unable to bend or break, had forced to lean landward. The view from this

spot was magnificent and very various. On the north lay the great range of high downland, betraying, where it trended to the west, its old seaboard position. Though the sea was three miles removed, the evidence of its former presence was evident in the waterworn and overhanging cliff. On the east nestled Casterton, as though secure in the vigilance of its giant sentinel. To the south was the grey, far-stretching sea, lit up here and there by a gleam of sunlight, and flecked by a white sail or red ; on the west stretched the vast low-lying marsh, which has been already adverted to, with its far-apart church towers and farms.

‘ A goodly spectacle, is it not, Miss Dart ? ’ exclaimed a voice close beside her.

The governess started, and almost screamed ; she was fairly frightened ; it had seemed to her that she was the only person just then alive in the world, and even that world had not been the ordinary and everyday working one.

‘ You have been dreaming,’ said Roger

Leyden, for he it was ; ‘a very proper thing to do upon Battle Hill. I do it myself.’

‘But how did you come here ?’ inquired Miss Dart. ‘I did not see a soul upon the road, nor was any one within sight as I looked around me.’

‘I was here before you (it is my custom to come here most mornings), and was hidden from you by the tumulus.’

‘The tumulus !’

‘Ah, you cannot see one,’ he replied, contemptuously : ‘unless there is something like a barrow, as our earth-worms term it, you cannot conceive that you are treading on the bones of captains and of kings. There has been no barrow here, except wheelbarrows—of which I have seen fifty at a time, when Lord Destray ordered the excavations to be made—from first to last. When a man is buried, we put him in a grave, with a mound at top of it ; but when a thousand men are buried—dead of the plague, for instance—they are thrown into a pit ; when they are murderers, ravishers, Danes, hateful to sight

and memory, whom for once you have gotten the better of, and exterminated, can you not understand that a whole hill piled upon them is not too much? That is what happened here.'

'Their bones, then, have been found?'

'No, I am thankful to say, they have not been found. The earthworms have their theories, and my Lord Destray acted on them. At such and such a depth he was told such and such objects would be discovered: the sword, the arrow — with which the long-perished Dead hoped to begin life anew in the other world; the drinking-cup, out of which he would quaff mead in the halls of Odin; the body itself, in a sitting posture, with an axehead of stone or a bronze dagger beside it. Nothing could be more satisfactory than the forecasts of the experts, down to the minutest detail; only, nothing whatever rewarded the explorers.'

'That must have been a great disappointment to them,' said Miss Dart. She was conscious that the reply would fall short of

expectation ; but her tongue, ordinarily ready enough for the occasion, somehow seemed to fail her. The old man beside her had spoken with a vehemence and disdain which were incomprehensible to her ; she felt that he was moved by considerations in which she had no share.

‘Disappointment !’ he echoed, scornfully. ‘Yes ; they were baffled, as such fools deserve to be.’

He bit his lip, and looked round him with an angry air.

‘How is it that the grass here is so soft and fresh, Mr. Leyden, and that on the lower part of the hill so short ?’

‘You have an observant eye,’ he answered, regarding her with keen scrutiny. ‘The soil above is rich ; even your chemist knows the virtue of blood and bone. The soil below—well, that is rich too, perhaps, but after another fashion. It’s a sore subject ; don’t let’s talk about it.’ Then he went on, more gently, ‘I’ve frightened you again. You must not mind *me*, my dear young lady.

Prophets are of no account in their own country, and nobody does mind me hereabouts.'

'That is surely a little ungrateful, Mr. Leyden, since I know some of your neighbours, at least, who regard you with both respect and affection.'

'Your hostess and her son—true. It was not because I had forgotten them that I spoke as I did. The world is divided for me into men, women, and Meyricks. It is only the last with whom I have any concern.'

'Miss Mary Melburn would scarcely like to hear me repeat that, I think.'

'Pooh, pooh! She would not believe you if you did. Indeed, I would not have you yourself, Miss Dart, set me down altogether as an ogre. Only when certain matters come into my mind, they make me misanthropical. To think that that good woman yonder'—he pointed in the direction of the Look-out, where the painted windows at the rear of the pavilion were reddening in the sun—'should have to pinch and save for want

of what could be so certainly obtained, if some folks had only a little faith! To see that poor boy pine and dwindle because the skill is dear which could make him, I am persuaded, like other men; and to know that one has only to stretch out one's hand!—Bah! it makes me mad to think of it! Forgive me,' he added, abruptly. 'Inadvertently, you touched a chord in this old-fashioned, out-of-gear instrument, and have produced harshness, caterwauling. You seem to like the old hill?'

'I admire it above everything. I have never seen any prospect half so glorious. It seems to me that to live at Casterton, amid such scenes and associations, must be one of the highest privileges within the gift of Fortune.' She spoke with flushed cheeks and earnest eyes; it was plain that she was paying no compliments.

'Yet people come and call it an interesting place to spend a few hours in. They come *here*, even, and say, "What a great hill!" They have eyes, but they have no

souls ; that's what is the matter with them.'

'Janet calls it the "Loomp,"' said Miss Dart, smiling.

'So they all do, hereabouts. The strangers are no worse than our neighbours. Familiarity breeds contempt.'

'But not with you, it seems.'

'No, not with me,' sighed the old man. 'In a few short years this neglected voice will be dumb ; and then there will be none—no, not one to point the road.'

His chin sank upon his breast ; his eyes were fixed on the ground which, with his foot, he feebly stirred. As he did so, he seemed, Antæus-like, to gather strength ; for presently he raised his head, and exclaimed, in loud, sonorous tones, 'And yet it is not lost, but only hidden. Before yonder sea gives up its treasure, this one surely shall be found. Such waste of wealth cannot go on for ever. Centuries hence it will be found ; but in the meantime the Good will lack, the Young decay. Heaven's will be done !' He raised his hat,

and the wind scattered the grey hairs about his head ; his face presented a picture of quiet resignation. ‘Come,’ he said, rousing himself with an effort, ‘they will be waiting breakfast for you at the Mayor’s House’ (he always called it by its old name, and never the ‘Look-out’). ‘I must not teach you to dream ; that is only fit for an old man like me. You are a worker, and will work to some purpose, or I am much mistaken. Let us go down.’

CHAPTER XVI.

CRITICISM.

WHEN Miss Dart returned to the Look-out she found the family already assembled at the breakfast table. When they heard who had been the companion of her morning's walk the two young people did not spare their insinuations.'

'You met by appointment, of course,' said Mary, confidently.

'It was made last night,' observed Matthew. 'I heard the old gentleman say he would be her cicerone.'

'It was remiss in Aunt Louisa not to have offered to be her chaperon,' remarked Mary.

'What nonsense !' put in Mrs. Meyrick, reproachfully. 'We all know that Mr.

Leyden always *is* on Battle Hill five mornings out of, six.'

'Just so, dear aunt,' said Mary, sweetly, 'and no doubt Lizzie was aware of the fact; that is what we think so indiscreet in her conduct.'

The badinage of the cousins pleased Miss Dart, since it was a sure sign of their being at ease with her.

'I only do not confess that I have fallen in love with Mr. Leyden,' she said, boldly, 'because, if I did, you would tell him.'

'Bravo, bravo !' cried Matthew, clapping his hands. 'This is as it should be.'

'Well, of course I knew it would be so,' said Mary. 'Now tell me all about it, Lizzie. I mean what you *can* tell us. Did he cast your horoscope last night, and predict your future fortune for you ?'

'You don't mean to say Mr. Leyden is an astrologer ?'

'At all events,' persisted Mary, 'he is a firm believer in the conjunction of the stars. Everything of importance he undertakes is

done under a certain position of the heavens, as he terms it. Over his door are three serpents with their tails in their mouths.'

'My dear Mary,' interposed Matthew, 'the serpents have nothing to with astrology; they symbolise eternity—the time it took to make that poor old castle of his habitable.'

'My dear Matthew,' observed Mrs. Meyrick, gravely, 'you are confusing Miss Dart.'

'Which was unnecessary,' murmured Mary, 'since she looked so much confused upon another account.'

In this raillery of Mary's, Miss Dart did not fail to recognise and welcome a novel condition of mind. At Burrow Hall she had shown no such disposition for such mirth; the high spirits of youth had been oppressed and kept under by a very Battle Hill of care.

'Seriously, Lizzie,' she continued, 'did not our dear old friend say some things that astonished you?'

'Well, yes, he did; but it was rather his manner than his words that astonished me

—the excitement and irritation which he seemed to labour under when mention was made of certain subjects.’

‘The treasure! You don’t mean to say he got upon the treasure?’ cried Matthew. ‘He rarely mentions that even to us, and never to strangers.’

‘Strangers?’ put in Mary, with demure reproach. ‘As if he considered Miss Dart a stranger.’

‘He really did hint something about wasted wealth—some recommendation of his that had been discredited.’

‘Then you must be in great favour with him, Miss Dart, I promise you,’ said Mrs. Meyrick, smiling.

‘I am very, very jealous!’ exclaimed Mary. ‘Mr. Leyden has not spoken to me upon that sacred subject for years.’

‘But what is the subject?’ inquired Miss Dart, with interest.

‘Well,’ said Matthew, ‘you must know, or rather you do know, for Mary tells me you know everything, that it was at this spot that

the Saxons under Egbert, or at all events during his reign, defeated the Danes. While employed in their usual occupation of plunder and pillage, they left their fleet at Casterton insufficiently guarded, and the Saxons destroyed it. After the Danes had had an exceptionally good time and sacked the churches of London and Canterbury—please note that fact—they came down here with their plunder to take it back to Denmark, and found no means of transport. Improvident persons are often accused of burning their boats, but in this case it had been done for them. In the meantime Egbert gathered together his forces, the whole district rose against the invaders, and for the first time they found themselves on the defensive. The chronicles affirm that they gave battle to the Saxons outside the town, and were not only defeated but exterminated. All beyond this is conjecture, but the theory is that before the catastrophe they buried their ill-gotten treasure. It is tolerably certain that it was never found, since Mother Church, who had

a keen eye for her possessions even in those days, had to put up with her loss, and the shrine of Canterbury, which had been for years the richest in England, remained for centuries one of the poorest. Now, it is Roger Leyden's contention, that because Battle Hill was obviously the most convenient spot to hide it, in readiness for embarkation in case the invaders had been victorious, or one of them had survived to fetch it, that the treasure lies there. His view is that the Saxons buried the enemy in thousands where they lay, heaping up on them—partly from the necessity of the case, but chiefly as a record of triumph—the largest sepulchral mound which was ever seen, and that with every spadeful they hid what was their own, and made it more difficult to recover it.

‘When the excavations took place, many years back, by the order of the late Lord Destray, Mr. Leyden laid his views before his lordship. “You will not find any relics of the slain,” he said, “at the usual depths for such discoveries, you will have to dig much

deeper." So far he was right ; only, since no bones were found, his lordship, who found the job, even as matters were, very expensive, declined to believe in their existence. A good many people are of his opinion, and indeed the place is more often called "The Lump" than with any reference to the historical incident which is supposed to have taken place there. As to digging through the upper part of the great hill and then through the lower, it is hardly to be expected that any one who has the money would be sanguine enough to do so at the recommendation of an enthusiast such as our friend. The present Lord Destray is in embarrassed circumstances, and the last man likely to undertake such an enterprise ; so in all probability the truth of the matter will never be ascertained. In the meantime, one feels thankful that dear Roger Leyden has not ten thousand pounds of his own, since he would infallibly spend it all in buying Battle Hill and excavating it.'

'Still, Mr. Leyden may be right,' observed Miss Dart, thoughtfully.

‘Now, this is very serious,’ observed Matthew. ‘It is bad enough to have a fanatic next door, but that he should find a convert under our own roof is terrible to contemplate.’

‘I only said “*may* be right,”’ remonstrated Miss Dart.

‘That is the first step, the next is “must be right,” the third is taking spades on starlit nights (with a large sack to hold the treasure-trove) and digging upon Battle Hill with Mr. Leyden. I can see them at it, my dear mother.’

‘For shame, Matthew!’ said Mrs. Meyrick, reprovingly. ‘You know you cannot see anything of the kind. I am glad to say you will not be worried any more by my son, Miss Dart, for the next few hours, for it is the children’s morning.’

As her hostess rose from the table Miss Dart postponed her natural desire to learn what ‘the children’s morning’ might mean for a better opportunity; but when she found herself alone with Mary, with whom, though she could scarcely be called her governess, it

was arranged that certain improving works should be read and discussed daily, she put the question with no little interest.

‘The fact is,’ said Mary, with a flush of tender pleasure, ‘that poor Matthew, though so ill and seldom free from pain, has a horror of being what he calls a mere cause of trouble and anxiety to others without being any good in the world. So three times a week he receives detachments of poor children, to whom he reads and plays. It is the only education some of them ever get, and never was schooling half so welcome. The little folks of Casterton adore him, and he takes no less pleasure in their society than they in his.’

‘How I should like to see them together!’ said Miss Dart.

‘That I am afraid can never be; the introduction of a grown-up person, he affirms, at once destroys their enjoyment, though with him they are as natural and as much at their ease as though he were their own age. I wonder whether it would annoy him if I were to show you a little poem he made upon them?’

To me it is simply charming ; but if you do not like it, please don't let him know that you have seen it. He is very sensitive, poor fellow, to every breath of censure. I am quite thankful to think that circumstances prevent the dearest wish of his heart being indulged—*i.e.* the publication of his poems—lest criticism should kill him, as it killed Keats.'

'Let us say, as it was fabled to have done so,' said Miss Dart, with a touch of professional manner. 'If I am favoured with a sight of these verses, which I should extremely like to see, I promise you that nothing I shall say of them will kill your cousin.'

Mary produced from her desk a little roll of MSS. ; they were beautifully written out in her own handwriting and tied together with a slender chain of hair, of the same colour as her own. Miss Dart could not help reflecting how sacred would these poor mementoes become to their possessor should anything happen to the author of them. 'I feel it is a breach of confidence,' murmured Mary,

remorsefully ; ‘and yet I am sure he would so value your opinion.’

An observation which, being paraphrased, thought Miss Dart, would run thus, ‘And yet it would be so sweet to find that you shared my admiration of his talents.’ The poem which Mary put into her hand was called ‘The Children.’

To grown-up beauty men are fond
Of singing frequent praises ;
Alike they laud brunette and blonde
With pretty high-flown phrases.
To me, though such ripe loveliness
No doubt is far the rarest,
Of all things fair, I must confess,
The children seem the fairest.

The children with their happy looks,
Their little joys and sorrows,
Their frank delight in picture-books,
Their wealth of bright to-morrows—
What heart but in their tiny hands
Is soft as wax for moulding?
What eye that sees their elfin bands
But joys in the beholding ?

Would those kind powers that dispense
Aladdin gifts befriend me,
No thorn crown of pre-eminence,
In letters they should send me ;

Only the skill to wake delight,
Like some old story-teller,
That for the darlings I might write
Such tales as Cinderella !

No bland reviewers' suavity
Of eulogy I'd covet,
They, with their eager gravity,
Should read my book and love it.
And they should come about my chair,
Their fondness all my glory,
And climb my knees, and pull my hair,
And thank me for my story.

To them when summer-time was bright,
Among the cowslip meadows,
Or round the winter fire at night,
While rose and fell the shadows—
Their faces all towards me bent,
Their eyes with pleasure glistening,
Their cheeks aglow with wonderment,
And all intently listening—

Would I discourse of gallant knights,
Their triumphs and distresses ;
Of giant foes and tourney fights,
And beautiful Princesses,
Of wide enchanted wanderings,
In distant tropic prairies ;
Of fairies, and all fairy things,
To these that are my fairies.

And when in far-off after days
My tales should all be over,
Though no rich cenotaph of praise
My memory shall cover ;
In some few hearts my name should wake
A touch of old affection ;
And kind remembrance for the sake
Of early recollection.

Miss Dart read it over to herself with great attention, while Mary watched her with glistening eyes.

‘How do you like it ? I do hope you like it, Lizzie ?’ she said, earnestly.

‘I think it most tender and touching.’

‘Oh, I *am* so glad ; and then you are such a good judge, too.’

‘I am not at all sure of that ; but I have read a good deal of poetry, and have at least some sense of proportion. I know of few poems on the same subject that strike me so favourably.

Of fairies and all fairy things
To these that are my fairies

is a charming couplet.’

‘But if it was published, what would the critics say ?’

‘I cannot answer for the critics. If it came out in a magazine it would be magazine verse, you see, which would be fatal. If it was published in a volume it would be by a new poet, and that also would be fatal—scarcely a day passes in which we do not hear compliments paid to writers of another age, while not a month comes forward that is not loaded with invectives against the writers of to-day. The dullest critic who strives at a reputation for delicacy by showing that he cannot be pleased may pathetically assure us that our taste is on the decline, and consign every modern performance to oblivion. Such general invective, however, conveys no instruction; all it teaches is that the writer dislikes an age by which he is himself probably disregarded.—That is not my thunder,’ added Miss Dart, smiling, ‘but Oliver Goldsmith’s; and what was true in his day is true in this. There are only a very few who are capable of judging literature, and far less poetry, on its own merits.’

‘Then you would not advise Matthew to publish his poems?’

‘I should not venture to advise him one way or the other; but if I had written a poem like this, and others equally good, I don’t think I should be afraid of criticism.’

‘Kiss me, Lizzie,’ said Mary, simply.

She obeyed, of course, and very willingly, and Mary hugged her in return. Nevertheless, it struck Miss Dart that it was scarcely a fair exchange of kisses. Her kiss had been given to Mary upon her own account, whereas Mary’s kiss was paid, as it were, to the credit of somebody else; it was a kiss at second-hand.

CHAPTER XVII.

LITERATURE.

IN the afternoon, when the children had departed, Mrs. Meyrick and Mary paid a few calls in the town, and Miss Dart was left to keep Matthew company. It was only very seldom that he was well enough to leave the house even in the invalid-chair constructed for that purpose, and he was much averse to such progresses, which even in that sparsely populated place attracted some public attention. It was a charity, he said, for any one to sit and talk to him, and the governess was nothing loth to undertake that task. He interested her very much, and she was glad to make further acquaintance with him. He invited her into the pavilion that he might have the pleasure of introducing her to his friends, as he termed showing her his books.

Friends, indeed, and no fair-weather ones, they are to all of us, and even if we differ from them, they will be no parties to the quarrel ; we may ' shut them up,' but they will not be offended ; we may ' drop ' them, but they are always ready to resume relations upon the old footing. We select them, grave or gay as our humour prompts, but they have no jealousies of one another ; in these respects it must be acknowledged that print and paper have the advantage over flesh and blood. But to him whom ill-health confines within four walls books are something more than friends. Love itself smiles on him from their pages and touches his lonely heart. Through them he sees the world from which he is debarred reflected from a hundred points of view ; on his couch, thanks to their magic art, he travels as on an enchanted carpet to distant lands ; through them his sympathy and his pity, which might lack an object, are kept alive and healthy. Above all, the capable soul which often resides in the frailest tenements of clay is led by them to the topmost heights

of thought and the brightest realms of fancy.

So was it with Matthew Meyrick. Condemned for life to pallet and cell, he had roved at his own sweet will through the bright fields of imagination and humour, and his mind was adorned with their choicest flowers. Of practical matters he knew little or nothing, and did not seek to know. This was, in some respects, fortunate for him, since the fruit of that Tree of Knowledge must needs have been bitter for him ; it was not through selfishness, or the reflection that they would last his time, that his eyes were closed to his mother's straitened means, or the end to which, economically as their little household was managed, their mode of life was slowly but surely tending : she had designedly deceived him upon that point, and it was not one, when once he was assured that all was well, in which he took much interest. He was aware that her income was small, and had shown his recognition of the fact by obstinately refusing to be taken to town for advice, and would probably have done so had

the hopes of any benefit to his malady resulting from such a course been much less problematical than they were ; but of the actual position of her affairs he had no suspicion. The effect of even the partial disclosure of it had not been such as to encourage her to further revelations. The avoidance of any reference to ordinary matters in his conversation would, as savouring of affectation, have been a drawback to most people, and would certainly have been so to Miss Dart, who put Humanity (as a topic) first, and Literature afterwards ; but his peculiar position was an excuse for him. He talked of books, and books only, for the same reason that others talk of bullocks ; it was the only subject he was acquainted with. He spoke, as is the habit with all invalids, of his own concerns, tastes, and prejudices, but without that egotism which illness often engenders.

‘ There is my Lord and King,’ he said, pointing to a voluminous edition of Shakspeare, with one hand, while he supported himself on his crutch with the other. ‘ He is the master

of the ceremonies who introduces me to my fellow-creatures ; without him I should be almost as much estranged from them as Crusoe on his island.'

'There is none like him, none,' observed Miss Dart, in a tone of subdued enthusiasm.

'You are quoting Tennyson,' said Matthew, smiling.

'To be sure, I had forgotten ; the observation is in "Maud," is it not ?'

'Yes ; there is no poet so much quoted without recognition. The reason is that, among his minor charms, he has the art of clothing common things in a poetical dress ; he could, I am certain, describe a gas manufactory in the most harmonious manner.'

'He has pictured a very prosperous one,' observed Miss Dart, slyly, 'in that very volume which you have just accused me of plagiarising from : "and mellow metres more than cent. per cent."'

Matthew threw back his shapely head, and laughed aloud ; a literary joke always tickled him.

‘I shall never read “The Brook” again,’ he said, ‘in the proper spirit.’

‘Yet a great philosopher has said that no man holds his religious faith sure and certain who cannot afford to laugh it : a hard saying for most people, no doubt, but, on the whole, a true one.’

‘There is, at least, no fear in that case of being laughed out of it,’ observed Matthew.

‘It means more than that, I think. You ought yourself to know the weak points in your citadel, and to be confident in its strength, in spite of them.’

‘But is it not possible to have a citadel without weak points ?’ he suggested, thoughtfully.

‘With some people no doubt it is : they are, however, exceptionally fortunate.’

‘I should, on the contrary, have said that such folk were the majority.’

‘I am speaking of sure and certain Faith, not the mere capacity for credulity. The majority of mankind have no citadel, but only an earthwork, from behind which, because they

can see no enemy, they exclaim, "This is impregnable."'

'You think about these matters a good deal,' observed Matthew, with interest.

'I have done so, though, I fear, to little purpose,' she answered. 'The effect of such reflections is often only to make one self-conscious—a very contemptible state of mind, whether in man or woman. For my part, I have done my thinking, if I may designate by so high a term those obstinate questionings of sense and outward things, those blank misgivings which, as Wordsworth yonder tells us, belong to the period of youth; he speaks of "worlds not realised." I wish to realise them; if not "eager-hearted as a boy when first he leaves his father's field," I am the reverse of the lotus-eaters with their "we have had enough of action and of motion, we." I have had enough and more than enough of stagnation. I desire to look about me and see what is going on.'

'And yet you have come to Casterton?'

'I am very glad I have come. Folk are

more picturesque here—I mean in character—than in London. You know what the poet says about that?’

It was kind and considerate of her to thus alter her manner of talk to suit his mood, but he had no suspicion of any such design in it. He thought it nothing surprising that when her mouth did ope out should fly a trope, or a quotation, and took her for a devotee at the shrine of Apollo, like himself.

‘Which is your favourite poet, after Shakspeare?’ he presently inquired.

‘Shakspeare is not my favourite, though so far the greatest,’ she answered frankly; ‘it is only a very few people who can say of the king that he is their best friend.

‘You comfort me,’ he answered, smiling; ‘I always ascribed it to my own feebleness that I find less pleasure in his society than in that of some of his inferiors.’

‘Of course one feels the difference of degree,’ she answered; ‘but besides, one is not always in the humour, as the American poet so charmingly confesses, for the grand old

masters. 'The strong meat of Milton, for example, once a month is as much as my constitution can stand.'

'Being an invalid, I partake of him even at longer intervals,' observed Matthew, demurely.

'But you are never afraid of Revalenta Arabica—Keats and Shelley,' she put in, sily.

'How shocking!' he exclaimed. 'All the good opinion I had begun to entertain of you, Miss Dart, is now scattered to the winds. How dare you to speak so of Keats? Think of his "Nightingale" with its woful picture of the world,—

Where palsy shakes a few last sad grey hairs,
Where youth grows pale and spectre-thin and dies,
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow and leaden-eyed
despairs.'

It was evident, from the pathos and earnestness of the speaker's tone, that the lines he quoted had, in his eyes, a personal application.

'But that is just what I complain of in your Keats,' observed Miss Dart, drily ;

‘there is no poet more suggestive than he, but he “melts the waxen hearts of men.” He is as morbid, though not in the same selfish and sullen way, as Byron.’

‘I love him,’ said Matthew, simply.

‘Yes ; but quite as much for his defects as his merits, and most of all—now confess it—because he reflects your own mood.’

‘There may be something in what you say,’ admitted Matthew, reluctantly.

‘It would do you good,’ observed Miss Dart, didactically, ‘to read Crabbe for a fortnight.’

‘But he is so deficient in imagination.’

‘He has none, and that is why I recommend him. He deals with facts that are outside ourselves. If he makes one weep, it is never on one’s own account. He does not appeal to our weaknesses, or lower the system, as the doctors say. He is a sure tonic.’

‘Shelley is tonic enough for me,’ said Matthew. ‘I admire him, I think, even more than Keats.’

‘And you do not love him so much? Come, be honest.’

‘ Well, no, I do not love him so much. He occasionally appeals to sympathies that seem altogether beyond me, and irritates me even when he is most charming—as in “The Cloud”—by becoming unintelligible. This is unpardonable ; because no writer—not even Tennyson—was ever gifted with greater grace of expression, while he is as harmonious as the bird he has immortalised. What music and almost colour there is in his “ Sensitive Plant ” ! what pathos, even, in the highest melodies, such as his “ Lines to an Indian Air ! ” He never gives us a false note.’

‘ Very seldom,’ said Miss Dart.

‘ Never, never ! ’ he answered, impatiently.
‘ What can be more exquisitely accurate than these lines in “ Dejection ” ?—

Alas, I have nor hope nor health,
Nor peace within, nor calm around,
Nor that content surpassing wealth
The sage in meditation found ;
And walked with inward glory crowned.
Nor fame, nor power, nor love, nor leisure,
Others I see whom these surround,
Smiling they live, and call life pleasure.
To me that cup has been dealt in another measure.’

The words lost nothing of their beauty in Matthew's delivery of them, though at the close his voice trembled a little, as the song of the lark when he nears the ground. It seemed that he had forgotten the presence of his visitor, for he moved quickly on his crutch to the window, where she heard him murmuring to himself those admirable lines beginning, 'One word is too often profaned for me to profane it.' There could certainly be no doubt of the reference they had to his own case ; and the plaintive and despondent tones of his voice thrilled the listener's very soul.

I can give not what men call love ;
But wilt thou accept not
The homage the heart lifts above
And the heavens reject not ?
The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow.

'You are wrong,' said Miss Dart, her cold critical tones breaking a long silence, and contrasting strangely with the other's impassioned speech—'you are wrong about Shelley never giving us a false note, as is

shown in those very lines. "Accept not" and "reject not" can surely never be what Webster calls even "an allowable rhyme."

'You are quite right,' exclaimed Matthew, in amazement; 'but how is it possible, since I have had those lines by heart for years, that such a defect could have escaped me?'

'Just because you had them, as you say, by heart. In your admiration of the sentiment of the poem you forget to criticise it.'

'I cannot criticise. I wish I could.'

'Why so?' inquired his companion, smiling. 'Is it not enough to be a poet?'

'A poet? Who told you I was a poet? Ah, it was that foolish talk at dinner yesterday! It is true I have written a few little things—Heavens, how the tin-pot mock modesty of the amateur author seems to ring in that sentence!—yet I should be sorry if you were to set me down in such a category—that is altogether, Miss Dart.'

'I am inclined to put you much higher; that is to say,' for she suddenly remembered that the poem which had so struck her fancy

had been shown to her in confidence, 'your appreciation of the poets seems to me quite different from that of the poetasters. If you would show me what you have written—although I am no critic, I am accustomed to winnow chaff from wheat—perhaps I could point out here and there some defect which has escaped you, or even suggest——'

'My dear Miss Dart,' he interrupted, eagerly, 'it would be such a charity! Roger Leyden cares for nothing that is not a thousand years old. I have no one else to advise me; and sometimes I think there is really something in what I write, and again sometimes that I am the same in mind as I am in body—just a feeble, barren, unnecessary creature.'

Whether Matthew Meyrick was a poet or not could hardly affect the question of his general usefulness; but Miss Dart understood what he meant as well as if he had expressed himself with the accuracy of a French mathematician. It is, in fact, only the merest paper-spoilers and blockheads who

look forward to seeing themselves in print, as a woman looks in a hand-glass in 'admiration,' and not 'for advantage.' Almost all of us have a modest hope that our work will serve some purpose other than the lining of a trunk, and elicit some spark of sympathy from a kindred nature. In Matthew's case there was also the wish to gain touch of a world from which circumstances had debarred him, but with which, in secret, he had a passionate desire to mingle.

With a blush at his own audacity, but without more ado, he opened his desk and brought out for his companion's inspection a bundle of MSS.; an action that would have alarmed some people very considerably. To one like Miss Dart, however, who had been used to looking over examination papers, the ordeal was not so very formidable; and as it happened, she was more than repaid for her good-nature by what she read. It was not that the poems themselves were very original, though they had genuine merit, but they proved a complete index of the writer's mind,

and afforded a study of character such as had never before been afforded her ; in the pursuit of which kind of knowledge the governess, as we know, displayed all the eagerness of the vivisectionist combined with a sympathy for the subject of inquiry from which the latter is so infamously free. In these compositions of an invalid, she expected to find very little that was objective ; much that was personal and morbid : the prolonged expression of pain, disappointment, and despondency.

So far from this being the case, the keynote of the poems was cheerfulness ; there was nothing of the atmosphere of the sick-room about them, and when they touched upon that topic at all they dwelt not on the patient but on the watcher :—

Weary ? No, I am not weary ; only of seeing you so.
Do not you think for me, dear ; I rest in the daytime, you
know.

That was probably what his mother had said to him in prose a hundred times, as she sat by his pillow ; but it was significant that

he had put on record what she had said to him and not what he had said to her.

Again, though the form of the verse showed in almost all cases from what mould it came, and its harmonies were often the echo of older music, the thoughts were generally fresh and bright enough. Upon the whole, Miss Dart was able to speak well of Matthew's productions without any strain of conscience, and, as a fee for her services, requested that one of his poems should be given her—a request that pleased him almost as well as her praise. Of the latter, indeed, she was so far from lavish that, though she had a scheme through which she hoped his talents might obtain some recognition, she concealed from him the high opinion she had actually formed of them lest disappointment should come of it.

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